1-1-2001

The magical nature of social reality

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by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Sociology

Major Professor: Michael M. Bell

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2001

Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The goal of this investigation is to develop a *sociology of magic*, which examines the dialectic relationship between everyday *objects* and quotidian social *process*. Magic is defined as a nearly invisible epistemology, where magical terminology is used to objectify the relationship we feel between the *object* or *process* and ourselves. Magic is *real* in this sense because it describes the lived, embodied reality of social process and material objects. It is a method for making invisible social process felt, explicating the way that social structures, objects, and actions, which are abstract, intangible and largely unintentional, become viscerally manifest. When we feel transformed by interacting with material things or feel changed by a ritual, we name the process with the vocabulary of magic. When we name something in this way it attributes causal authority to mystical sources, demonstrating our awareness of magics potential to act on our subjectivity as if it possessed transcendent force. The paradox of magic is that while individuals must labor to invest objects, words and rituals with the meaning and resonance that leads to magic, this process allows us to experience them as if they possessed this meaning independently. Thus while magic is usually portrayed as capable of handling individuals like objects, we recognize that magic is susceptible to manipulation. When we are moved by magic we feel as if transcendent forces change us, transform our core, but this transcendent power is embedded in social action. To explain the dynamic process described by the word "magic?" I have often turned to the "logic" of traditional magic, of name karma, animism, and the stories of magical heroes written for children. If the vocabularies of magic and the supernatural are used to meaningfully describe everyday aspects of social life, then that meaning should relate to the stories we tell of literal

magic. When human behavior is explained by "transformations," "invocations," or "conjuring," this language reflects the workings of a magical epistemology that is often left unrecorded, despite the intriguing word choice.

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HOW I DID IT AND WHY

> The Satanic Bible came out in 1969 and hasn't been out of print for 30 years. The philosophy really isn't that esoteric and doesn't take much pondering to understand. But it's that looming figure in the shadows, that majestic silhouette of Satan - leathery wings outstretched, standing proudly, backlit by the flames of Hell—that people find...disquieting - High Priestess Blanche Barton -Church of Satan

Satan Prends Pitie de ma Longue Misere

This project began innocently enough. I wanted to make a birthday card for a friend, and to make this birthday card I needed a picture of the devil. I wanted it to be an evil looking picture. I wanted a giant, menacing, red, horned, leering Monarch of Hell. I wanted flames, and sulfur, and the souls of the damned crying for mercy at the feet of the Father of Lies while he cast them into a pit of fire. It sounds like a lot, but I figure a birthday only comes round once a year. Of course with expectations this high I was bound to be disappointed, and it turns out that the Tim Curry character from the movie "Legend" and medieval woodcuts dominate the Internet image pool. To make it up to me, the Internet disgorged great volumes of fascinating information when I ran a keyword search on terms like "Satan," "Devil," "Beelzebub," "Satanic," "Demonic," and "Prince of Darkness." As a result I stumbled on to the website for the Church of Satan (www.churchofsatan.com). Founded in 1966 by Anton Szandor LaVey they are both the first and most prominent organization to openly advocate "Satanism." As a result they remain somewhat defensive about the nature of their sacrament and ritual practice. They stress that child molestation, ritual sacrifice, and mass murder have always been essentially media fabrications and never part of their own program. There are no

"Satanists bent on enslaving the world through drug use and sacrifice of babies bred for that purpose by emotionally unstable women" (Church of Satan). Instead they subscribe to their own alternate version of the Mosaic decalouge, and I decided to use it for my birthday card project. See Figure 1.

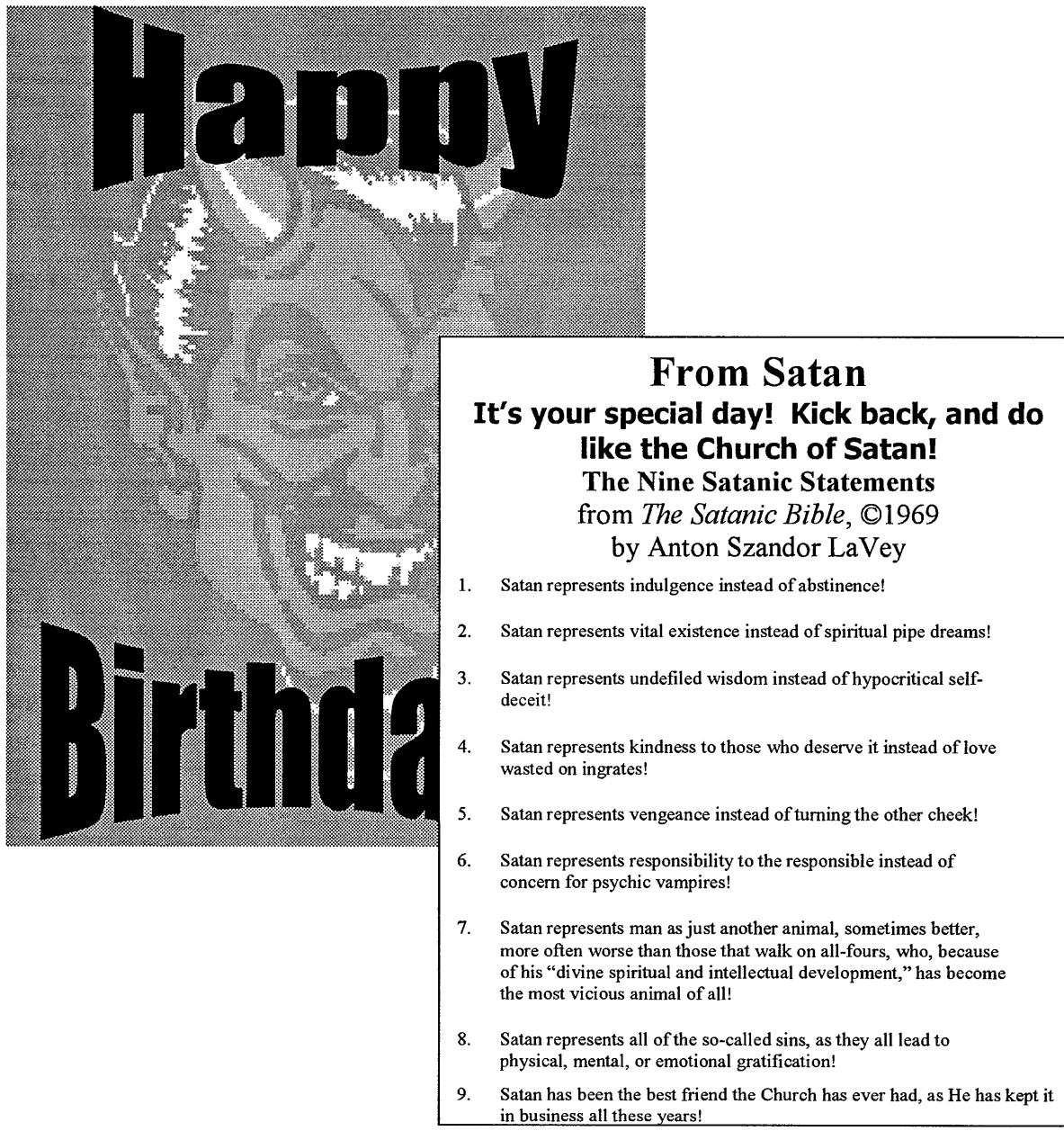

Figure 1. My Satanic Birthday Card, the origin of all that follows.

For a birthday card this seemed perfect. The Satanists celebrate a variety of holidays, but aside from Halloween, they usually insist "one's own birthday is the highest Satanic holiday of the year" (Church of Satan). And after all, it's a birthday, go wild, go for "indulgence instead of abstinence" and maybe a little "physical, mental, or emotional gratification." LaVey personally thought Aleister Crowley had his tongue "jammed firmly in his check," but the nine Satanic Statements are awfully reminiscent of Crowley's famous dictum, "do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law" (Fritscher 1972, 120).

And on your birthday why not, go ahead and do what thou wilt. But this got me thinking about the implications of a group whose ideology espoused such behavior on a year round basis. And what I was thinking, as I am wont to do around the beginning of the semester, is that I could write a paper about this, a Sociology of Satanism. Maybe it could even be turned into a thesis? To this end I started reading, and things seemed pretty simple at first. LaVey and the Church of Satan advocate a mirror image of traditional Judeo-Christian values, arguing that that the seven deadly sins are actually virtues, and that we should always strive to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Their dogma seemed to easily reduce into something very like rational actor theory, a calculating hedonism. The DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY PAMPHLET NO. 165-13 on the needs of selected religious groups characterized the "basic teachings or beliefs" of the Church of Satan:

> Satan is not visualized as an anthropomorphic being, rather he represents the forces of nature. To the Satanist, the self is the highest embodiment of human life and is sacred. The Church of Satan is essentially a human potential movement, and members are encouraged to develop whatever capabilities they can by which

> they might excel. They are, however, cautioned to recognize their limitations - an important factor in *this philosophy of rational self-interest* (my emphasis).

I thought this advocacy of a "philosophy of rational self-interest" could be a stepping off point for a Focaultian analysis of Satanism. If Focault seems dismayed by the effects of disciplinary power in modern life, the church of Satan appears to celebrate it. They seemed to represent the ultimate manifestation of the disciplinary society Focault had described in *Discipline and Punish;* they seemed to wear their power structures on their sleeves. The topic has a tabloid quality that would be nicely offset by the cachet associated with Focault, but remain sensational enough to be sexy, in the academic sense. In my mind the Focaultian Devil gazes out from the Panoptican tower and calls me; invites me to interview him, to record his thoughts on pleasure and discipline and power. I do the obvious thing. I send him a survey. This is my imaginary thesis.

Interview with the Focaultian Devil

Hi, my name is Neil Dryden, I'm a Masters student in Sociology at Iowa State University and I'm hoping you will be willing to fill out a short survey. You were identified as a likely respondent through your status as the supreme Lord of Darkness, and your prominent position in the pantheon of the supernatural.. This survey is part of a larger research effort aimed into the methods by which individuals create and maintain identity through everyday, objects, rituals and customs. You're an inspiration to great many occultists, like those who join the Church of Satan. Your opinion matters to these people, the way you dress and act, the books you read, and the music you listen to, is sure to be adopted by those who follow you. If you endorsed Martha Stewart tomorrow all the

Satanists would start making gingerbread houses and melon ball salads. So I want to hear it straight from you, tell me about the stuff you like, what it means to you.

1. **Who is your favorite band or author?** Feel free to describe anything from a genre of music (goth, deathmetal, lamentations) to a specific song or part of a song (the first line of Bela Lugosi's Dead by Bauhaus), from a genre of literature (horror novels, ghost stories) to a particular scene in a book or movie (the little yellow bird scene in the Crucible).

2. **What was it like when you first encountered he/she/it/them?** Do you still feel a tingle when you meet other people who feel the same way (a sigil of baphomet, an inverted cross)? Everyone presents themselves to the world through things. The clothes you wear, the way you decorate your home, the music you listen to, the books you read. These things can never be neutral. If you wear a suit it says one thing, if you have a goatee and a black velvet cape on it says another. However I believe that especially with the music and books and movies we enjoy there is often a good deal more to the relationship. Tell me how these things have moved you or tell me why you disagree.

The Focaultian Devil: My favorite book, hmmm, well I really enjoyed *Discipline and Punish* by Michel Focault.

Neil: Well that's fascinating, Focault writes a lot about power, and you followers seem very concerned about it as well. In fact the Church of Satan seems rather obsessed with material wealth and privilege. I mean, it is one thing for Benjamin Franklin, or an employer, to champion the merits of hard work and individual success. It is quite another when a church follows suit. They seem to transparently and clearly articulate the ideology of a power system, especially striking since they claimed to do so in the name of truth and religion

As founder Anton LeVay put it in one interview, "death to the weakling wealth to the strong" (Church of Satan). Stratification is openly admired:

> There can be no more myth of "equality" for all—it only translates to "mediocrity" and supports the weak at the expense of the strong. Water must be allowed to seek its own level without interference from apologists for incompetence. No one should be protected from the effects of his own stupidity.

The Focaultian Devil: Well, Focault talks about two primary results of a disciplinary model of power: the increase of economic utility and the emphasis of individual over community identity. This new mode of power ran concurrently with new modes of production, and acted to "increase both the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system" (Focault, 218). A training that allows control over not just the result or product of one's labor, but also over the way that product is created allows for massive increases in productivity. The peasant who is required to yield a certain percentage of his crop is not required to produce that crop in the most efficient manner.

Neil: Well what about collective identity then, it would seem advantageous to band together and collectively achieve greater material success, but the Church of Satan seems to rather violently reject this notion. Even between the "strong," or among Satanists, collective identity is not a desired outcome. Michael Rose, Magister of the Church of Satan, has an essay posted on their website deriding those who write to "Brother Rose," and proposing they "leave such nonsensical notions of 'Brotherhood' to the Christians" (Church of Satan). Individuality is one of the key concepts of the Satanism he articulates:

> Christianity considers the individual as but one part of the collective human whole, part of a single big family. Furthermore, they believe that there is a mystic spiritual bond connecting all Christians and making of them a part of the "Body of Christ." There is no regard for the value of individuality in Christianity. In contrast to such notions, the individual is the foundation of Satanism. We should always regard one another first and foremost as individuals, not as parts of some collective whole. There is no spiritual bond between Satanists. We are not mere components of some mystical "Body of Satan." We should leave such idiotic notions to lesser creatures. (Church of Satan).

The Focaultian Devil: Well, Focault would say this is a necessary corollary to the increases in economic efficiency. In order to gain this kind of control each individual must be singled out and evaluated, tested, and ranked. The training that imparts this level

of control also emphasizes the importance of the individual, as "the principal elements are no longer the community and public life, but, on the one hand, private individuals and, on the other, the state" (Focault, 216). The unique feature of the discipline as a mode or "mechanics of power" was the level of control that it made possible (Focault, 138). Where older systems placed requirements on the "products of labor" the disciplinary mode of power operated "not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines" (Focault, 138).

Neil: Yeah, but they've really taken this to the extreme, I mean they don't even want to have churches for people to mingle in, because it attracts low achievers who only want to socialize, "pen-pal and coffee klatch conclave members" (Church of Satan). Instead they want their members to be the best and brightest, the "true elite of talented, highly-motivated, productive, creative, and above all independent individuals" (Church of Satan). This was the motivation for an organizational restructuring carried out in 1974, designed to ensure that only high achievers remained in the ranks. Up to that point the church leadership had issued charters to local groups, called grottoes, in particular communities just like any church. However, it was decided that this model only encouraged "certain members to confine their efforts at personal advancement to the realm of the Grotto alone, rather than towards the success in the outside world—which is of paramount importance to Satanism" (Church of Satan).

The Focaultian Devil: Well of course, as the disciplinary mode of power maximizes economic utility, the Church of Satan valorizes those who achieve the greatest levels of material success. They are institutionally dedicated to "rational self-interest, indulgence,

and a glorification of the carnal and material" pleasure of life, but only in relation to the rest of society (Church of Satan). The Church of Satan and the Temple of Set are disciplines, with all the Focaultian baggage this implies. Disciplines that embrace the creation of a particular kind of individual; "a reality fabricated by this specific technology that I have called discipline" (Focault, 194). At first glance, they appeared to have rubbed away the madness, irrationality, and spiritual aspects of religion to create a creed that exactly echoes the machinations of power, and impose it on every aspect of their own lives. They seemed to revel in the application of disciplinary power. Focault stressed the pervasiveness of these new mechanisms of power, "their spread through the whole social body" and the Church of Satan could serve as the ultimate archetype of disciplinary power, with it's stress on producing clearly articulated individuals oriented to economic efficiency and utility (Focault, 209). Exclusively negative readings of power are refuted by Focault, arguing that "power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (Focault, 194). In the modern era power is exercised through the discipline, "a new modality of power" (Focault 192). One important element of this power was surveillance, and Jeremy Bentham's prison design, the Panopticon, is cited as "a figure of political technology" that has become near ubiquitous (Focault, 205). Corporations who monitor their employees Internet activities, and working parents who install webcams to watch their nannies are only the most visible of the current manifestations of panoptic discipline. For them disciplinary power isn't a burden to be endured, it's the natural expression of human nature.

Neil: That doesn't make any sense, if they're so dedicated to a rationalistic, utility-maximizing life, why do they even bother with you? Why do they call themselves

Satanists? Near as I could tell they're a sordid mixture of Ayn Rand's objectivism and a Mensa club that likes to dress up in flowing black robes. Moreover, they don't actually view Satan as a literal being, but simply as a symbol of freedom and knowledge. Why pick a symbol that will instantly associate your group with "kidnapping, drug abuse, child molestation, animal or child sacrifice" and more?

The Focaultian Devil: Why they did it for precisely that reason. They define themselves as Satanists purely as an oppositional device, attracted by the radical posture of their imagery:

Satanists find more strength in images of defiance, fortitude against all odds and self-determination than we do in the image of the guy hanging on the Cross. We are sickened by the complacency, hypocrisy, prejudice, and self-righteousness that most conventional religions…encourage in people. (Church of Satan).

Neil: Okay, but still Satan seems a little bit far out just to express some revolt. I mean, what's more American than revolution? Certainly defiance and rebellion seem to matter a great deal to the Church of Satan, and any other Satanists, but most people can express this same feeling with black leather, tattoos and heavy metal music.

The Focaultian Devil: Well, they also believe in magic of course.

Neil: What! I thought you were making a case that the Church of Satan was the ultimate product of the disciplinary society that Focault described. You mean to say Satan is invoked as a symbol of rebellion and personal independence, the "better to reign in Hell" of Milton's Lucifer, but he is also invoked because they believe in *magic*. These are some awkward details, how can they believe in both rationality and magic?

The Focaultian Devil: Well, in the late 60's, when LeVay wrote the Nine Satanic Statements shown above, he also laid out "the Eleven Satanic Rules of the Earth," though these were only distributed to the faithful at the time. Unlike the Statements, these had a noticeably occult character. You are admonished not to disturb "another's lair" and to bother no one "when walking in open territory" (Church of Satan). Rule number seven makes this supernatural connection explicit: "Acknowledge the power of magic if you have employed it successfully to obtain your desires. If you deny the power of *magic* after having called upon it with success, you will lose all you have obtained" (Church of Satan). Throughout their website the Church of Satan emphasized the rational, high-achieving individualists, but the belief in magic is present if one looks a little. They treat it like a slight embarrassment that is nonetheless very important to them. "Anton LaVey never advocated anything "spiritual," so disabuse yourselves of this myth" but he did "advocate exploration of the supernormal—a very different enterprise" (Church of Satan). Of course, most of the differences involve strenuously denying the mysticism inherent in their ritual, ritual which they claim has a scientific basis, or at least it will soon, the science-fiction of today turning into the science of tomorrow.

> The Church of Satan has always looked for knowledge to science, both Western and Eastern. We call this "Undefiled Wisdom," and this is the ever-deepening understanding of the nature of the beast-called-Man and the Universe in which he exists. We don't accept faith or mysticism. We demand bedrock knowledge—Understanding—which can come from outward research and observation as well as carnal intuition...Dr. LaVey explained: "Satanic Ritual is a blend of Gnostic, Cabbalistic, Hermetic, and Masonic elements, incorporating nomenclature and vibratory words of power from virtually every mythos.

Those "vibratory words" are used by the Satanic magician to send "forth a vision of what you want to occur (the *Is To Be*)" which if you are powerful enough and the conditions are right "will permeate the unconscious minds of those you wish to influence, causing

them to behave as you Will when the time is right" (churchofsatan.com). There is also a whole arcana of lesser magic to be deployed for more everyday circumstances, and requires less psychic energy. There are whole lists of equipment designed for these rituals, chalices, candles, coffins, knives, pentagrams, robes and more.

Neil: Well this is quite a shock, are all Satanists like this?

The Quasi-Focaultian Devil: Of course, some even more so. For instance, let me tell you about my favorite musician, Diamanda Galas. Although she would not identify herself as a religious Satanist by any means, she has used the idea and the identity at times to advance her critique of modern American society. If the Church of Satan has taken the concept of Satan as far as possible in the direction of rational utility, while retaining a troubled relationship with the magical potentials of Satanism, Galas explored these "magical" possibilities in the fullest. Her first recorded work was a setting of the "Litanies of Satan" by Charles Baudelaire's:

O thou who knowest all, Hell's sovereign,
Known healer of mankind's afflictions,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!
Thou who the lepers and pariahs doomed
Show out of love the Paradise to come,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress! (52).

Her second album contained a piece based on Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon conception, sung from the point of view of a prisoner who is going insane, and with the clear implication that the panoptic prison is both a literal jail, as well as a metaphor for many parts of society:

"I have become a stranger to my own
needs and desires
I look and see things that are not there
And I ask myself
And I ask
And I ask
I say:
What is my name?

What is my name?
What is my…
What is your name, darling
What is your name, angel
What is your name, honey
What is your name, baby
What is your name, baby

Your name is that of a condemned man
Your name is that of a condemned man
You have no name
I WILL NOT BE SEDATED
I WILL NOT BE SEDATED
I WILL NOT BE SEDATED
I WILL NOT BE SEDATED

These two ideas are not unrelated, as Galas explained when asked what Satan or the Devil meant to her:

> Baudelaire described "Satan" fairly well." When a witch is about to be burned on a ladder in flames, who can she call upon? I call that person "Satan, although other people may have other names, and it's the same entity that schizophrenics call upon to create an essential freedom they need. It's that subversive voice that can keep you alive in the face of adversity. If you've ever been institutionalized (and I have), then you know what a dead end it is. And if you can come out of it alive, then you are so much the stronger. I have this text: "You call me the shit of God? I am the shit of God! You call me the Antichrist:' I am the Antichrist, I am Legba, I am the Holy Fool, I am the Scourge of
> God" (Legba is the trickster in West African tradition). So you say, "Yes, I am the Antichrist, I am Legba, I am all these things you are afraid of (Juno, 53).

The lyrics to her "Panoptikon" drew on and were additionally inspired by the book "In the Belly of the Beast," by Jack Henry Abbot. The message she drew from his work was less about Abbot's own particular prison inspired madness, than it was a recognition of a "spiritual situation we carry inside ourselves" that comes from the society we live in (Juno, 57). She saw the Panopticon that was the prison, but she also saw the panoptic nature of society generally. She is actively opposing the definition of mental illness, and what it means to be sick, the definitions that come from Psychology, Medicine, Economics, Sociology, and Anthropology. When asked about her "Panoptikon" and her views on the madness that come with that type of prison she replied,

> In prison, since you don't actually have space, you invent it. And you need dialogue -- that's why people become schizophrenic: to provide themselves with the dialogue

> they're not getting in real life. That's also partly why people take drugs-if you're alone and isolated (which is like a whole dope fiend trip) then you lack this dialogue -- it's an essential freedom and need. If you don't have it, ultimately you die.
>
> AJ: But it's society which has created this isolation --
>
> DG: 'that's the caging. However, mental illness isn't just socially created -there are all kinds of realities involved, including biochemical factors. In any case, schizophrenia or multiple personality disorder can provide an essential liberation, a form of freedom from permission -and my work is always preoccupied with freedom (Juno, 45).

Galas was also active with AIDS groups, notably in fighting against quarantine regulations imposed on AIDS victims by several European countries, and as the quarantine was the model Focault identified for the disciplinary society, this brings her "Satanism" one step closer to Focault's critique of modern power systems. For her "Satan" represents the oppressed voice, historically in the burned witch and in the modern patient of a mental health ward. "Satan" is the struggle against all the small restrictions and impositions that prop up modern "egalitarian" society. Satan is a voice to draw upon when rationality is not enough, a way of expression that reconnects to an earlier way of thinking, a holy madness. It's really much more flattering.

Neil: Thanks Quasi-Focaultian Satan, you've been a big help.

The Sociology of Satanism into the Satanism of Sociology

My interview with Satan told me a lot I didn't yet know, and it rearranged my priorities. Instead of what Sociology could tell me about Satanism, I began to wonder about what Satanism, and their satanic magic, could tell me about Sociology and the social world in general. The mainstreams Satanists look a lot like an exaggerated version of classical Sociology, loudly insisting on the primacy of reason but still holding on to the vestiges of an magical worldview. Satanists on the fringes, like Diamanda Galas, look a lot like post-

structuralist sociology and cultural studies, so much so that I can't see what the real difference is. In other words, an alternate history of social theory can be found within the 20th century history of Satanic or Satan identified groups. The Church of Satan promotes as a belief system something very close to what rational choice theory or game theory purports to see as a natural condition within society. One position has embraced a analysis that understands the power of the invisible and the magical, while the other remains openly scornful while cherishing secret doubts and hopes. This double arc of theory is a rather emphatic way of emphasizing that Sociology and Sociologists are embedded within the society they attempt to explain, a fact that is often acknowledged more often than it is dealt with. This is important to me for two reasons. First it means that Sociology is not necessarily producing a body of progressive, cumulative, objective body of knowledge. Instead Sociology has drawn the boundaries of what constitutes sociological knowledge to gather and maintain power and authority, and historically this has given the background of quantifiable data a privileged place and discounted the importance of the foreground of phenomenal social construction. Second, both Satanism and Sociology delight in debunking, in revealing what they take to be the "real" underlying truth of a situation. Members of both groups have been guilty of "opiate of the masses" analysis, that is, analyzing the material conditions of a social situation as if they undermined the validity of experience. Satanists are liable to challenge Santa Claus as a collection of pre-Christian archetypes. Sociologists may challenge the traditional Christmas as a product of late 19th department stores. In doing so both imply that their revelations should change the ontological status of the holiday, devalue and desacrilize the experience.

Reading about Satanists was the first time I came across an example of individuals using the language and vocabulary of magic to objectify the process of social construction and individuation. At first, I thought the Church of Satan were emblematic of the modern age because they had internalized an ethic of materialism, competition, and individuality. Through their somewhat shamefaced claims for Satanic magic, and the much more strident claims of Diamanda Galas, I came to think that something much stranger might be going on, that there might be other elements in the way we confront the panoptic, disciplinary machine. I still think the Church of Satan is emblematic of the modern age, because they struggle between the rational and the irrational, and because they use magic to confront and channel the mundane world of utility. They serve as a paradigmatic case because they have taken tendencies, the rational utility-maximizer, and the magician to their extremes, and so allowed them to emerge in the open, whereas both modes of thought are usually much less visible. In basic terms, they showed me a site where agency and structure meet, and lead me to believe that new sociological imaginations, new vocabularies, and new methods are needed to study this site or moment. This chance encounter with Satanism, an esoteric group of little popular influence, convinced me of the inadequacies of the critical vocabularies at hand, and of the need to extend the range of the empirical, to allow sociology to analyze the magical nature of everyday life. I began to wonder if our relationship with the social world, people, things, rituals, and processes, is really quite a rational as it is usually portrayed, and I began to wonder about the magical nature of social reality.

Sociology Hates Magic

Magic as a concept has been the object of sociological analysis since the dawn of the discipline, although usually as a concept to be discredited rather than developed.

Antecedents for studying magic exist directly in both Weber and Durkheim, and obliquely in Marx. For Weber magic was the source of "charisma, meaning literally gift of 'gift of grace," (Weber, 52). It was important primarily because "the legitimacy of charismatic rule thus rests upon the belief in magical powers" and so the ordering of society can rest on the retention of "magical power" (Weber, 296). Elsewhere he explicitly recognizes the powers designated by magic or mana as residing in charisma. Durkheim saw magic and religion as closely intertwined, "the beings invoked by the magician, the forces he brings into play, are not only of the same nature as the forces and beings appealed to by religion, they are frequently identical with them" (Durkheim, 1995, 43). The difference is then not in the fundamental operation of magic, but rather that "in magic there is no church," and the magician works for the individual, not for the collective (Durkheim, 1995, 43). In this way both see magic and religion as springing from the same basic category of experience, the sacred. Durkheim is explicit in this belief, and it is implied in much of Weber's work, as in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* where he describes the Puritan rejection of "all signs of religious ceremony" because they had "no trust in the effects of magical and sacramental forces on salvation" (Weber, 1930, 105). Both theorists, when they turned their hand to analyzing magic, did so on a macro-sociological basis. For Weber, magic/charisma played a part in the creation and maintenance of social order in so far as it could act as a source of authority for the charismatic ruler. For Durkheim, magic and religion could be a source of social cohesion, a key element of what he identified in organic solidarity. Additionally, both saw the influence of magic declining rapidly in the western world. For Weber, the story of modernity was often the story of increased rationalization, which limited the opportunities for charismatic leadership to assert itself. For Durkheim these same

developments undermined the religious and magical authority that he saw constituting organic solidarity, giving way to the mechanical solidarity of the industrial age. In a pattern that will repeat many times, both theorists also admit that traces of magical thinking remain in the western, industrialized world, but they are few and inconsequential.

The supernatural is also present in Marx, although much more obliquely, and in a much more neglected fashion. Historical materialism may seem like the concept least likely to understand magical forms, but the manifesto of the communist party began by declaring that "a spectre is haunting Europe" (Marx & Engels, 2). Capitalist society itself "is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells" (Marx & Engels, 8). The challenge laid down by this supernatural side of Marx has recently been taken up, particularly by Jacques Derrida in his *Specters of Marx.* Derrida "returns to the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Eighteenth Brumaire,* not least to suggest Marx's own ambivalence with respect to spectrality as such...and transforms the conventional view of commodity fetishism, whose dancing tables now strongly suggest poltergeist as much as they do items for sale on a shelf somewhere" (Jameson, 76). Marx typifies sociology's other relationship with magic. Durkheim and Weber admit the existence of magic, while at the same time trivializing it as an outmoded concept quickly disappearing from the modern world. Marx, on the other hand, shies away from it, barely hinting at it's immense importance for modernity, leaving it like an unpaid debt to haunt the future of a discipline struggling to come to terms with forces of production that are magical Regulated by invisible hands.

Anthropology Does Too

Anthropology has multiple distinct traditions for investigating magic, very often on a micro-sociological level. In England, Edward Tylor and James Frazer (author of *The Golden Bough)* spearheaded one of the earliest and most systematic attempts to classify magic, particularly in contrast to science and/or religion, a comparison that would be taken up more famously by Bronislaw Malinowski. Tylor and Frazer's theories were deeply rooted in the paradigms of their time, particularly a deep-seated faith in the evolutionary and progressive nature of history, leading them to portray magic as related to religion as the child is related to the adult. Even more telling for the purposes of this essay Tylor, also believed that magic in western culture, such as spiritualism or seances, were remnants of the same child-like error. Tylor and Frazer both located the error of magic in the confusion engendered by similarity, leading to "homeopathic magic" based on "the laws of similarity and contact." Frazer attributes the origins of homeopathic magic to the "fallacy of magic," a "mistaken application of the very simplest and elementary process of the mind, namely the association of ideas by virtue of resemblance or contiguity" (Tambiah, 57). In other words, when the hunter creates an effigy or image of his game, Frazer believes he does so in the mistaken belief that there is a casual, rather than simply a symbolic, linkage between the image and the animal.

In this way, as Malinowski put it, "both magic and science show certain similarities, and, with Sir James Frazer, we can appropriately call magic a pseudo-science" (Malinowski, 87). Malinowski proposed a more sophisticated, but hardly more satisfactory, theory to explain the origins of magical thought. In his view when humans encounter situations of great stress, when they reach the end of their technical competence, then "fears and hopes, induce a tension in his organism which drives him to some sort of activity...drive him to

some substitute activity" (Malinowski, 79). This substitute activity is often a "free outburst of emotion in words and deeds...the threatening gestures of impotent anger and its maledictions, the spontaneous enactment of the desired end in a practical impasse" (Malinowski, 80). The result of this "universal psychological mechanism" is "a very deep conviction of its reality, as if of some practical and positive achievement" (Malinowski, 80-81). At best, Malinowski suggests magic and religion are no more than the power of positive suggestion; at worst, he suggests that a huge proportion of the world spends much of its time engaged in self-delusion.

Both these strands of the English tradition thus locate the source of magic within individual psychology, and both believe that it represents an attempt at understanding and manipulating the casual ordering of the world. That their readings seem inadequate today is not surprising, but in fact, outside the cozy insularity they worked within, their analysis was not considered any great shakes at the time either. Ludwig Wittgenstein's commentary on Frazer's work, unpublished at the time, succinctly summarizes the problems that any serious examination of these explanations of magic presented, both then and now. Malinowski and Frazer both explicitly describe the experience of magic as an emotional one, and this is the key to many of their problems. It is also impossible to ignore the hierarchical connotations of this stance, emotion being a lower form of experience than reason, just as magic is a debased form of science. Wittgenstein emphasizes that "Frazer's presentation of the magical and religious views of mankind is unsatisfactory: it makes these views appear as errors" (quoted in Tambiah, 57). His objection centers on overly simplistic assumptions about the goals and purposes of what are admittedly emotional events. "Magic always depends on the

idea of symbolism and of language" it "brings a wish to life; it manifests a wish...an error only arises when magic is interpreted scientifically" (quoted in Tambiah, 59).

There is a separate tradition, often rooted in Durkheim through his student Mauss, and his student Levi-Strauss, both of whom wrote extensively about magic in non-western settings. Marcel Mauss appeared to accept Durkheim's definition of the magician, but also investigated the origin of sympathetic magic in early classification systems (*Primitive Classification)* and the role of the sacred or mana in society generally. Levi-Strauss examined shamanism and concluded that much of their magical efficacy is tied to the power of suggestion, very like Malinowski's hypothesis that magic is used by "savages" mainly in situations of uncertainty, and so helps engender the confidence and sense of control needed to act in dangerous circumstances. What these theories share with those previously discussed is the presumption of error. Durkheim, like Tylor before him, compared the mind of the "savage" believer in animism with that of a child.

All these theories of magic have several things in common. First, they assume that western, or modern, or industrialized, or "civilized" society is fundamentally different from primitive or pre-modern societies that use magic. While almost no one will deny the presence of magic in western society, it is always minimized and devalued out of hand. Malinowski argued that "this power...seems to get hold of us from outside, and to primitive man, or to the credulous and untutored mind of all ages...must appear as a direct revelation from some external and no doubt impersonal source" (Malinowski, 81). This view, indeed even the phrases will be repeated, runs throughout the literature on magic. Its presence in the modern world, the civilized world, the industrialized world, the rationalized world, is only a revenant of past times, and archaic holdover from a superstitious past that has no relevance

for the social sciences. Second, they all assume that attributing magical force in this way is basically in error, that even when magical thought is functional it does not accurately reflect reality. I wish to contest both views.

But Some People Think "Magic Is Real"

Despite the problematic way the social sciences have dealt with magic, and all unseen social forces in the past, there are a handful of theorists and researchers, mostly contemporary, whose work and conceptualizations can shed light on the sociological nature of magic today.

In a 1999 article titled "Animism Revisited" Nurit David-Bird argues that animism, one of many potential epistemologies, allows a greater recognition of the relatedness of the world. She draws largely on fieldwork done with the Nayaka people of southern India. The Nayaka practice something that would traditionally be described as animistic, whereby members will address "devaru," who represent elements of their environment, both organic such as wildlife, and inorganic, such as rocks and streams. Bird-David goes to some lengths to reject defining devaru as simply spirits or supernatural beings because she believes this artificially imposes a uniquely western, positivistic interpretation. The question is, if a devaru is a person representing some element of the Nayaka's lived social reality, what kind of person are they? In her conception personhood is attributed to non-human aspects of the environment because when they are understood as "dividual . . .a person constitutive of relationships" a concept taken from the work of Anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (Bird-David, 72). Specifically, they "are constitutive of sharing relationships reproduced by the Nayaka with aspects of their environment" (Bird-David, 73). Bird-David shows how repositioning magic as a relational epistemology can explain and validate magic as a way of

knowing the world, and a way of constructing the self. She strongly objects to understanding magic, and animism in particular, as a failed epistemology or an inaccurate version of positivist reality testing. Instead, as Wittgenstein argued magic, "brings a wish to life...manifests a wish," Bird-David argues that animism for the Nayaka and others "objectifies" the relationship between the individual and the other being. "A hill devaru," for instance, "objectifies Nayaka relationships with the hill; it makes known the relationship between the Nayaka and the hill" (Bird-David, 73).

This introduces several corrections to earlier notions of animism and magic. First, it expands the range of magical influence. Wittgenstein described magic involving a wish because Frazer and others saw magic primarily as wish fulfillment, hunters seeking game, sailors desiring wind. I believe our relations with social and natural environments are much more complicated than the word "wish" would suggest, and the range of relationships individuals may feel with the non-human elements of their environment go far beyond this. Second, this new conception of animism puts the animistic or magical attribution after the establishing of a relationship. The Nayaka treat devaru as persons, "as and when and because they engage in and maintain relationships with other beings" not vice-versa.

Bird-David concludes:

> ...within the context of the modern state and its political, economic, and educational institutions, relational ways of knowing have lost much of their authority. But they continue to operate nonetheless and remain deeply embedded in the experience of everyday life. (Bird-David, 81)

This attitude is remarkably like that of prior anthropologists, whose work on magic and animism Bird-David critiqued so astutely, intimating that magic still survived in modern, western, industrial societies, but that it had been driven underground, and was largely inconsequential, lacking authority. In the past, social scientists condemned non-western

practices as irrational, and so declared them absent from the "mind of the civilized rationalist." The post-modern social scientist all too often is guilty of the same offense in reverse, declaring non-western practices efficacious and so absent from western society. Here I sense a discontinuity between our criteria for judging western and non-western societies. To demonstrate the vitality of animistic epistemology among the Nayaka of southern India, Bird-David did extensive fieldwork over the course of a decade and closely investigated the actual social practices of the culture. But, when evaluating western epistemology, we turn to books, and the books of the western canon claim to be rid of primitive thinking, a conclusion blithely accepted.

I hope to provide a counterpoint to "Animism Revisited" by doing "fieldwork" on contemporary American culture, and demonstrating that magical, relational epistemologies are vibrant and critical for the "modern" as well as the "primitive." What does it mean that an epistemology has lost authority? If a magical epistemology remains alive for many people, can it really be said to be lacking in authority, or is it just unremarked, invisible? If so, what does it mean to be invisible in this way? Bird-David shows one way that magic may be understood as a relational epistemology, escaping the charges it had previously faced as a failed scientific epistemology. However, she fails to adequately address the nature of the experience. In other words, what is the nature of the Nayaka experience with the Devaru? If it is true, as she claims, that animism only as and after a relationship is felt, if the Devaru are "*emergent*, constituted by relationships which...are not totally given [but] must be worked out in a variety of social process" then what are those social process? What do they look like as the happen? How do they feel? This is a subject that will be increasingly taken up by other social scientists who attempt to interpret magic in the modern world.

The problem is repeated in many other anthropological attempts to come to terms with magic as "real". Mansell Pattison, in a psychoanalytic case study, argues for the efficacy of traditional folk healing and exorcism. The patient, a young woman, suffered from a spirit possession, one that the family would previously have treated with an exorcism. However, this route was not immediately available because "we don't talk about these things anymore, because, you know, we're Presbyterians now" (Pattison, 271). Pattison encouraged the family to forgo the psychoanalytic treatment he could offer and perform the exorcism, as they would have before conversion and reports that the patient was completely rid of the symptoms of the spirit possession. Pattison argues that the "same discovery and process of integrating symbolization can be found in the therapies of indigenous folk healers" as in western psychology (Pattison, 275). "The symbols of a ritual unite the person and his culture" and "thereby create a symbolizing therapy that integrates the conscious man with the unconscious realties of his socio-cultural development" (Pattison, 275). These studies are very important in restoring the efficacy of magical forms, but they do little to explain what a magical encounter looks like. What does it feel like to "integrate the conscious man with the unconscious realities of his culture?" "The symbols of the rituals" may "unite the person and his culture" but this does not explicate the mechanism by which this can happen, leaving magic still wearing the guise of a strategy or wishful thinking that has been so thoroughly degraded in the past.

The nature of the magical experience is one important element developed by Jack Katz in *Seductions of Crime*, an attempt to rethink the study of criminology by shifting the focus from purely background factors to the foreground of the actual criminal experience. Katz objects to the stranglehold that background socio-economic factors hold for explaining

criminality. Different kinds of crime may be considerably more prevalent within certain groups; however, this still means that the vast majority of those groups do not engage in criminal or deviant behavior, and even habitual criminals spend a extremely small percentage of their lives actively engaged in deviant behavior. To understand this variance we must appreciate the "authentic efficacy of sensual magic" (Katz 1988, 8). Many of the conceptualizations we have visited so far have made it clear that magic is experienced as if "from the outside" as Malinowski put it, but none seem to have understood the ontological implications of this. When magic (like passion, rage, or any emotional state) is experienced as if "an object controlled by transcendent forces, an individual can genuinely experience a new or different world" (Katz 1988, 8).

> By pacifying his subjectivity, a person can conjure up a magic so powerful that it can change his ontology. What begins as an idle slapping or fondling may lead to the discovery of rare truths or the acquisition of a new incompetence. It is necessary to indulge a fiction or invoke a ritual to begin the process, but if one does not hedge on the commitment of faith, otherwise inaccessible phenomena may come into reach bringing revelations or shutting off part of one's freedom and confirming that the initial commitment was authentic. In religious practice, we may find the results of this dialectical process inspiring; in sex, delightful...there is a genuine experiential creativity. (Katz 1988, 8)

Here Katz directly addresses my concern over the nature of the magical experience. If I may extend this Katzian argument to the Nayaka for a moment, we can see how the nature of ontology and epistemology make the process more complicated than Bird-David's account conveyed, as well as explaining anthropology's long dismissal of animism and magic. When earlier social scientists saw magic as a strategy for manipulating the natural and social world, it looked like a rather dense failure. Katz understands the magic/religious experience as akin to an emotional one, and as such by definition not a strategy. The Nayaka were probably not sitting around southern India one day when it suddenly occurred to them that if they

personified elements of their environment they could come to better understand it. This is almost certainly not what happened:

Nayaka #1: You know, I've been thinking, we don't really understand our social and physical environment as well as we could.

Nayaka #2: 'I've got an idea, what if we alter our current notion of personhood to include all elements of our environment that we relate to!'

Nayaka #1: 'That's a great idea, we can dress up in costumes to act out the part of the trees and the boulders, and the elephants and everything, and then we'll talk with them, and so by the process of literally talking with the non-human persons we interact with we can become "increasingly sensitized to pick up information n the emergent, processive, historical, and reciprocal qualities" of our "relatedness" to our home' (Bird-David, 77).

Nayaka #2: **'**Why, this is so much better than that silly Cartesian logic, dualistic structures, and atomistic conceptions of the individual those suckers in Europe are using theses days, we should tell them about it.'

Katz argues specifically that to understand crime and deviance we must understand "the lived mysticism and magic in the foreground of criminal experience" because ontology changing experiences are what allow significant changes in social action (Katz 1988, 311). Bird-David is explicit in linking epistemology to ontology, following Dewey and Bentley in that "knowings are always and everywhere inseparable from the knowns" (Bird-David, 87). The epistemology or epistemologies that are put in to play will effect the kind of ontology we experience. This leads directly to my next challenge. My project was founded on the firm belief in the importance of magical experiences in modern, everyday life, always

remembering "it's not that the ghosts don't exist" (Gordon, 9). What does it mean to accept the social reality of ghosts and other magical forms. What does it mean that, as Michael Bell puts it, "despite our mechanistic and rationalistic ethos" we "live in landscapes filled with ghosts" (Bell, 813). What is the meaning of this *despite?* If I must state my answer in a single breath, I would say that despite the professed supremacy of a "mechanistic and rationalistic" epistemology, a magical epistemology continues to operate, made invisible by the dogmas, but not the practices, of modern man.

Magic Is Invisible

The challenge of studying magic as I have begun to lay it out here is that while magic as an epistemology may run rife through daily life, it is hard to separate from the many other epistemological modes that are equally and simultaneously present. Especially since explanatory preference is often given to other modes of thought, and when "magical" or "supernatural" causes are presented as explanations in a western context it is often overlooked, disregarded, or ignored. Declarations of magic have become so formulaic as to be invisible, at least in the West, to Westerners. The story is radically different when Westerners study other parts of the world. It is usually assumed that westerners, or the majority of them at least, posses a scientific or rational worldview, while most of those outside the industrialized world are traditional, superstitious, or magical thinkers. The implicit assumption is that both a culture and an individual can posses and utilize only a single epistemology. Sometimes more sophisticated readings will allow that western or otherwise rational individuals will, at times, slip into pre-modern or superstitious thinking, but this is only a variation on the same assumption. Either way, epistemology is assumed to be monolithic, only one can operate at a time.

Keith Thomas, in his seminal work *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, presents a slightly more balanced view, but still fails to adequately account for the co-occurrence of science and magic. His work demonstrates both one of the most important developments in thinking about religion and magic and one of the more problematic features. Thoma's major contribution to the question addressed here is to problematize religion and magic as separate universal categories for analyzing human behavior. Instead he situates magic, the concept used by the anthropologists reviewed above, as a product of a specific moment in European history, created out of the convergence of mechanical scientific world views and Protestant theology that was congruent with Cartesian logic. "The line between magic and religion is one which is impossible to draw in many primitive societies; it is equally difficult to draw in medieval England" (Thomas, 50). This conception of magic (much more in line with Rudolph Otto's idea of the holy) frees the analysis from superficial comparisons of form, and allows a more significant look at the experience of magic.

However, Thomas perpetuates the invisibility of magic or magical thinking as an epistemology. Despite some passing remarks early in the work that allude to the overlap of magical and scientific ideas and methods, he falls firmly in line with influential theorists like Weber and Merton in declaring that magic was banished by science, assuming that only one worldview could exist. Weber, for instance, clearly presents the rise of rationalization as the triumph of a mechanistic philosophy, and so the "elimination of magic from the world" (Weber 1992, 105). This is a way of thinking deeply embedded in the notion of a paradigm shift and the work of Thomas Kuhn, which, no matter how helpful in other ways, fundamentally denies epistemological overlap.

The need to believe in our shift from a faulty, superstitious, supernatural paradigm to our modern rational scientific paradigm has produced some odd results, a curious set of blinkers on our presentation of the world. In the history of science this meant that for many years Isaac Newton's work on alchemy is ignored or brushed over with some embarrassment. Frances Yates, in her work *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition,* presents a case study of the selective interpretation and presentation of the rise of science. Yates demonstrates that Bruno was held up for years as an exemplar of enlightened Renaissance philosophy, particularly for his defense of Copernicus and the heliocentrism. She also demonstrates that Bruno quoted, at length, from magical texts in his own work, and justified his defense of the Copernican system through reference to the work of "Hermes Trismegistus," a work "concerned with astrology and the occult sciences, with the secret virtues of plants and stones and...sympathetic magic" (Yates, 2). In anthropology the opposite is true. Whether supportive or dismissive of non-western worldviews, the majority of anthropological conceptualizations have exhibited an alarming degree of xenophilia, fixating on the overtly foreign. Edward C. Green, an outspoken proponent of collaboration between African traditional healers and western medicine, has criticized this tendency among medical researchers. He believes "the overemphasis on witchcraft by earlier anthropologists" is due in part to "xenophilia—an attraction to the more exotic and flamboyant elements of African medical culture" (Steinglass, 35). He argues that this xenophilia then blinds outsiders to the complexity of belief systems and leads to shallow, one-dimensional representations of culture. "African survey respondents, asked to explain the causes of certain diseases, may reply, "It's the will of God" and so have their belief system classified

as "supernatural or personalistic," ignoring the way "western oncologists might utter the same words when asked why a child contracts leukemia" (Steinglass, 35).

This belief in the singularity of epistemology, a willful blindness to the layered and interactive nature of belief systems, epistemologies, and cultures is what makes studying magic in the present day such a challenge. It also forces magic into invisibility, unnoticed even when it is articulated, and often left unvoiced, or incomprehensible even as it happens. To meet the challenges presented by magic's low profile, I have chosen to approach the phenomena from a variety of different angles. The "data" is comprised of a series of case studies examining the explicit logics of various magical or supernatural systems, such as sympathetic magic, name karma, animism, and so on. The case studies are made up of literary, interview, and what Benjamin called "other cultural texts". The website of the Church of Satan provided the first of these sites. In the pages to come I shall look for a descriptions of the magical experience in autobiographical works by Rick Bass and Donald and Steven Barthelme, hunt for the sympathetic magic in the Gummi Bear, the name karma expressed by Virginia Woolf, and the animism that music fans deploy on behalf of their favorite artists.

By contrasting an explication of a literary or cultural case study and the open beliefs and dogmas of a supernatural institution I hope to demonstrate that a great deal of everyday life is concerned with this type of magical relationship between individuals and the objects and rituals they use to define themselves. Often the m-word, *magic*, was the marker that alerted me to a "location" where investigations of magical action might be fruitful. When magic is used as a metaphor to describe a situation, what are the underlying experiential elements being described? What is the dynamic process described by the word "magic?"

Often, as a source of guidance, I would turn to the logic of traditional magic, of name karma, animism, and the stories of magical heroes written for children. If the vocabularies of magic and the supernatural are used to meaningfully describe everyday aspects of social life, then that meaning should relate to the stories we tell of literal magic. When human behavior is explained by "transformations," "invocations," or "conjuring," this language reflects the workings of a magical epistemology that is often left unrecorded, despite the intriguing word choice. In other words, I hope to demonstrate that both the language of magic and the mythology of the supernatural and occult spring from this very basic form of social action, the lived magic of everyday life.

The goal of this investigation is to develop a *sociology of magic*, which examines the dialectic relationship between everyday *objects* and quotidian social *process* on the one hand, and the creation of self and individual ontology on the other. Here magic is defined as a nearly invisible epistemology, a relational phenomenology that examines the way we attribute magical, animistic, or supernatural qualities, and so objectify the relationship we feel between the *object* or *process* and ourselves. Magic is *real* in this sense because it describes the lived, embodied reality of many social process and material objects. It is a method for making invisible social process felt, explicating the way that social structures, objects, and actions which are abstract, intangible and largely unintentional become manifest, viscerally, inside of us. When we feel transformed by interacting with material things or feel changed by a ritual, we name the process with the vocabulary of magic. When we name something in this way it attributes causal authority to mystical, extra-human sources, and demonstrates our awareness of the potential for those magics to act on our subjectivity as if they possessed transcendent force. The paradox of magic is that while individuals must labor

to invest objects, words and rituals with the meaning and resonance that leads to magic, this process allows us to experience them as if they possessed this meaning independently. Thus while magic is usually portrayed as capable of handling individuals like objects, we recognize that magic is susceptible to manipulation, and so magical process can be engineered to achieve a desired result. When we are moved by magic we feel as if transcendent forces change us, transform our core, but this transcendent power is embedded in social action.

The Magical Nature of Everyday Life

The goal here is not to "restore" enchantment to society, but rather to sociology. And to establish a methodological beachhead for a sociological writing that can perceive the very palpable magic of everyday life. This is not an anti-rationalist project, though it is a critique of rational actors as they appear within the sociological canon. I do not believe in a utopian past, before capitalism, Protestant ethics, and rationalization eroded meaningful social life. Following Michel Focault, the individual has always been the product of power, created by exclusion and discourse, "soul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge" (Focault, 29). This is a powerful relational sociology, but it is important, particularly for our purposes, to hold on to that element of relationality. The problem is brought into greater relief when examined in light of Pierre Bourdieu's articulation of a similar idea:

> When I talk of [any given] field, I know very well that in this field I will find 'particles' (let me pretend for a moment that we are dealing with a physical field) that are under the sway of forces of attraction, of repulsion, and so on, as in a magnetic field. Having said this, as soon as I speak of a field my attention fastens on the primacy of this system of objective relations over the particles themselves. And we could say, following the formulas of a famous German physicist, that the individual,

> like the electron, is an *Ausgeburt des Felds*: he or she is in a sense an emanation of the field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp. 106-7).

Relational theorists have made the concept of person problematic, something that has to be constructed, but I want to distance myself from the perils of the mechanical metaphor that Bourdieu employs, evocative though it may be. When personhood is constructed through magical interactions it is an interactive process, an affective modality of knowing that establishes individual relations with the hopelessly intertwined social and natural environments. Individuals are not like iron filings, uniformly pushed or pulled by the magnet, but rather highly creative readers of the objects and rituals of the social nexus in which they are enmeshed. Magic is the word we use to describe this type of interaction, the sign that locates the event sociologically. Like the experience of the sacred, it is not reducible to concepts, "a mental state...sui generis and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every other absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined" (Otto, 7).

But what I hope to find in theses various case studies, fictional, biographical and cultural texts, is not evidence of the long sustained exercise of power that Focault tracked, or the dream life of the last century that Benjamin sought, but rather evidence of the reaction to those things, the way individuals take in their social environment and make it their own, and make out of it themselves.

Fictions, Biographies, Surveys and Other Cultural "Texts"

A number of Sociologists have attempted to operationalize this type of concept recently, most significantly for my purposes Avery Gordon and Jack Katz, looking at

haunting and emotions respectively. At the heart of both efforts is a critique of the dominant methodologies and practices of the social sciences which they believe failmere

to grasp wide swaths of social life. They argue that we need a method for examining the *foreground* of experience and for explicating different modes of experience, particularly *sensual knowledge* as opposed to "cold hard facts." In this critique the sensual, revelatory knowledge that is experienced at the foreground of experience is not privileged over the demographic, background facts that dominate much of the discipline today. Rather a balance is sought, a questioning of the way those data that can be quantified are favored over the sensual dynamics of everyday life. Mary Louise Pratt has argued that a similar struggle can be seen in ethnographic narrative, in the struggle between scientific "objectifying description" and "personal narrative" (Pratt, 32). She argues that personal narrative remains a "conventional form in ethnographic writing" because it satisfies a claim to authority not available through objective description (Pratt, 32). "Personal narrative persists alongside objectifying description because it mediates a contradiction...between personal and scientific authority," between knowledge of the foreground and knowledge of the background (ibid.). Science as a source of authority has tried to kill narrative, mere anecdote, in Sociology but it has never succeeded because social scientist often need the authority granted by personal experience, the immediate sensual understanding that can be conveyed by narrative but not by totalizing, objective, scientific accounts. This means that narrative of one sort or another is important to my project both as a method of examining a theoretical problem and a source of data to be examined.

Bearing in mind these two distinctions, between the background and foreground and between reason and emotion (to put it very crudely), Katz and Gordon offer powerful

arguments in favor of narrative texts as a starting point for the analysis of magic. Katz emphasizes that our methods must be consistent with the behavior we seek to describe, that we "will have to risk being lousy poets because our subjects are constantly obliged to take on more immediate aesthetic risks" (Katz 1999, 11). In addition, in his criminological work, he argues in favor of using non-fiction and journalistic accounts as data. He argues first that we can evaluate these accounts as we would any other ethnographic interview, comparing different parts of the same work, multiple works within a field, and the whole range of other data that exists on a given subject. Secondly, he argues that these accounts represent unique and valuable sources of data because of the very nature of the phenomena studied. "Given that these events are exceptional in both statistical and moral senses, writers will almost invariably come to them after the fact" making it impossible to study a sufficient number as they happen (Katz 1988, 281). How would a researcher have planned to be present at the moment when Proust dunked the crucial madeline in his tea? And even if we could observe the moment, would it serve a purpose? The process is "too desperate, too existentially compelled, too raw to be simply spoken" (Katz 1999, 14). As Katz described the process of a murderer confessing under police interrogation, "the metaphors in his speech, his emotional expression, and his corporeal gesture are part of a frantic search for a serviceable vehicle for situated action" (Katz 1999, 14). After the fact we are often inchoate, unable to articulate the experience or its significance; certainly Proust did not jot down the first few pages of *A Remembrance of Things Past* on a napkin in the café. Narratives of magical experiences can serve as found interviews of moments we are not likely to witness, and even less likely to make sense of on our own.

In *Seductions of Crime,* Katz has performed two other very important services. First, he has expanded the realm of magic into western society, and second he has demonstrated how magical process works on an everyday level. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination,* by Avery Gordon continues this project in an invaluable analysis of haunting as social phenomena, especially as she has put forward a methodology for studying invisible social process like magic when they are both omnipresent and sporadic without obvious research sites. Gordon analyzed haunting primarily through the novels of Toni Morrison and Luisa Valenzuela. In *Beloved,* by Toni Morrison, a former slave named Setha must deal with the haunting presence of her daughter, whom she killed rather than allow her to be returned to slavery. Morrison presents the haunting as absolutely tangible and real, without any overt concern for the niceties of ghost stories; the ghost is as real as anyone. Beloved, as she is called, has simply returned to live with her mother and sister, and their lives detail the real consequences for all those haunted in this way, regardless of the corporeality of their ghosts. *Como en la Guerra,* by Luisa Valenzuela, is concerned, in a fragmented and allegorical way, with the "disappeared" of Argentina's dirty war, a subject that has obvious relevance for the study of haunting. Gordon describes (though perhaps not *defines)* haunting in this way, among others:

> If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure. . . haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition. (Gordon, 8).

Gordon is explicitly trying to use fictional sources as case studies for a work on the sociological imagination, and has several relevant justifications for doing so. She begins with a critique of both positivist and post-modern methodologies for examining phenomena that are rooted in the foreground of affective understanding. Gordon describes "the limitations of many of our present modes of inquiry and the assumptions they make about the social world" as key factors in Sociology's inability to talk with ghosts (Gordon, 8). "The available critical vocabularies were failing (me). . . the constellation of effects, historical and institutional, that make a vocabulary a social practice of producing knowledge" were/are incapable of describing the delicate and complex nature of social life, and incapable of "understanding how social institutions and people are haunted" (Gordon, 8). She goes on to point out the ways post-modern epistemologies have also failed to provide a vocabulary or a practice that can do what she asks. In a critique of one "particularly prominent framing of postmodernism, an overweening and overstated emphasis on new electronic technologies" she argues that postmodern claims of hypervisibility, created by new media technologies, again overlook the ghosts and deny the haunting that is so pervasive in modern life (Gordon, 13). The claims of hypervisibility "display an anti-ghost side" that has "replaced conventional positivism with a postmodern version" (Gordon, 13).

Like Katz with emotions, Gordon is trying to describe the foreground of social life, elements harder to quantify, "not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought...a living and interrelating continuity" (Gordon, 198). She identifies three particular reasons why we need to think in terms of a structure of feeling, three ways in which the current methods are flawed. First, that the social sciences view ongoing "relationships, institutions, and formations" as fixed, "an inert past tense" that doesn't recognize the flexible,

multi-layered, and changing nature of any of these relationships (Gordon, 198). Second, that having defined only those things that can be fixed and frozen as social facts, the rest, "the moving present," becomes merely personal, and so not material for social analysis (Gordon, 199). The third problem is a product of the first two, which leave social theorists "with highly reified asocial abstractions that fail to capture just the conflagration of 'social' and 'personal' that is the living present" (Gordon, 199).

A structure of feeling, "elusive, impalpable forms of socials consciousness . . . evanescent as 'feelings' suggests, but nevertheless display a significant configuration captured in the term structure," can avoid these problems (Gordon, 201). "A haunting is a shared structure of feeling...a specific type of sociality. . . the sociality of living with ghosts, a sociality both tangible and tactile as well as ephemeral and imaginary" (Gordon, 201). Haunting is an affective process, changing the perceptions and actions of those who are haunted, and it is ubiquitous. "The ghostly phantom objects and subjects of modernity have a determining agency on the ones they are haunting, which is everyone, making our lives just what they are at any given moment-a tangle structured feelings and palpable structures" (Gordon, 201). To study this Gordon has found fictional case studies useful because they enable a new kind of sociological imagination, and "allow other kinds of sociological information to emerge" (Gordon, 25). She quotes Regin Robin's "statement that 'something crosses over the disciplinary boundaries which only fiction can apprehend, like a trace of unassumed contradictions, as the only way to designate the locus of it's own production" (Gordon, 36). Embedded in this conception of fiction is the fictionality of the social world, the way that all social science writings are fiction: fictive not as false, or opposed to true, but "fictions in the sense of something made or fashioned...based on systematic, and contestable,

exclusions" (Clifford, 6). Fiction is for Gordon a door to new understandings, a way of stepping outside of the institutional strictures and letting theoretical and conceptual work breathe freely. It is valuable because it can speak to those parts of the social world that are concerned with magic in ways that more traditional academic writing and research cannot, and so must be cherished within our work.

My data consists of a series of case studies of narrative texts, fictional, biographical, and cultural. Both theory and example suggest the value of this type of data. All of the theorists discussed so far have used narratives, from Toni Morrison novels, to autobiographies of murders and stick-up men, to the poetry of Baudelaire, and architectural plans. The reason for this can be seen by examining the similarities among their work: which aspect of each theoretical agenda that made narrative analysis of one sort or another attractive? One key element is the distinction between sensual and factual knowledge important to all the above. *"It is not the object of the story to convey a happening per se, which is the purpose of information; rather it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening"* (Benjamin 1968, 159). Mere information, cold hard data, cannot help to understand an affective, sensual experience. To put it somewhat differently, any attempt to operationalize concepts of the foreground rather than the background requires "a method attentive to what is elusive, fantastic, contingent, and often barely there" (Gordon, 39). When we seek to study magic, we must accept that our methods must also become somewhat magical, holding the very stuff we seek to analyze firmly in both hands.

BLACK MAGIC AND WHITE MAGIC

> The problem with the way we communicate our emotions...is that we tend to leave the emotion itself out. Mostly what we are doing when we are investigating an emotion is surrounding it, giving it a clearer background. That background can extend, in classical psychoanalysis, to the cradle, but as for the emotion we are experiencing, it can somehow not have been touched itself ...generally what will have been accomplished is sort of a dissipation and distraction.
>
> C.K. Williams – Poetry and Consciousness

In this provocative essay on the nature of consciousness C.K. Williams has advanced a solution to one of the most significant problems that presents itself to a social theory of the foreground of experience. The social sciences do not have a clear conceptual vocabulary for talking about or describing the lived, embodied reality of daily life. His particular example is depression, pointing out that if someone announces they are depressed, we are relatively confident we understand what that person is experiencing. However, this is essentially the end of our ability to describe the nature of depression, or any other emotional state. Instead we tend to investigate "what I am depressed about" (Williams, 2). In this I hear immediate echoes of Jack Katz's frustration that "the lived mysticism and magic in the foreground of criminal experience became unseeable" (Katz 1988, 311). Or Avery Gordon lamenting that "the available critical vocabularies were failing...the constellation of effects, historical and institutional, that make a vocabulary a social practice of producing knowledge" that are incapable of describing the unquantifiable present moment (Gordon, 8).

Williams has a solution to this problem. He believes that in poetry we already have a method for describing the experience of emotion "with great precision and rigor" (Williams, 4). I do not want to claim that magic is simply some special kind of emotion. Nor do I feel comfortable in separating the elements of the foreground in this way. The place where we experience magic is in the present, where emotion and reason speak to each other to such an

extent that they cannot be separated. What Williams, and Katz, and Gordon are all describing is the place where consciousness generates meaning, and in the spirit of C.K. Williams, I shall seek an understanding of this process in authors who write poetically, if not poetry per se.

This first case study will examine works of autobiographical non-fiction. One is a tell-all about gambling addiction, "the gripping account of a two-year gambling splurge and its aftermath," and the other an autobiographical account of training a German shorthair pointer for hunting pheasant and grouse. Frederick and Steven Barthelme in *Double Down: Reflections on Gambling and Loss* and Rick Bass in *Colter: The True Story of the Best Dog I Ever Had* both qualified as case studies in magic by the simple expedient of using the *m*-word. They qualify because the magical moments they describe *are not* magic as an adjective, magic as efficacy, 'boy Magic Johnson sure is a good basketball player' magic. Instead they describe those moments where an individual is shaped and guided by the belief that *things* are alive. Both books meet this initial criteria, but as C.K. Williams might have predicted, also expand it.

Colter is in one sense a very straightforward book; just as the title says, it is the true story of the best dog Rick Bass ever had, from puppyhood to death. However, it is also a complicated and fascinating look at the relationship between Bass, the dog, and the rituals and environment of bird hunting. The relationship between Bass and his dogs is clearly, as he describes it, a magical one, not simply anthropomorphizing the dogs as any pet owner could do, but also animating the landscape around him. He describes finding his first two dogs, on the side of the road by an old abandoned shack in rural Mississippi, as a magical experience. He stopped when he saw them, picked up one, but the other ran back into the

house. He tried several times to lure it out, but eventually gave up and drove off with only one dog. He then describes the way he changed his mind, deciding to return and try again, as he drove down "the winding road through the dusk tunnel of soft green light" (Bass, 10). He fails this second time as well, but as he drives again through the same stretch of country road, he "passed through that same invisible curtain – a curve of landscape, a mosaic of forest, and an open field beyond" (Bass, 11). He asks, "with what subtle assuagements does the landscape sculpt our hearts, our emotions; and from that catalyst, sometimes, our actions" (Bass, 10). It was for him "a feeling, a change, as dramatic as if I had passed though a doorway, and into an entirely different room" (Bass, 11). This is a metaphor that Bass returns to again and again in describing his relationship with his dogs, and with nature in general. He speculates that it is something like what Edward Wilson called biophilia, something he had carried with him since he was a child, because children could enjoy it as fully as adults, not "a case of the woods allotting only a half dose of their magic to children" (Bass, 18).

Bass is not, however, arguing that nature is a font of magic for any who would attend to it, not even that it is so for him. He describes at length the way he was affected, particularly when bird hunting with Colter;

> To enter the world of bird hunting – to have the quarry leap into the bright sky, rather than bounding off into the brush, or into the fog – and to have a magician alongside and in front of me who would always reveal where the quarry lies...it was like passing through a door, one I didn't even notice was there, into a place of light and beauty. (Bass 2000, 33)

However, this experience, this "travel to a luminous new country," does not come to him unproblematically whenever he wanders off into the woods (Bass, xiv). He describes how it

comes on in relation to his first two dogs, and most especially with Colter, the hero of the story, so to speak. He describes returning to a "tiny little swamp pocket of aspen and cottonwoods" shortly after Colter had died, with a new dog. He comes across a scene of "breathtaking beauty...amidst the black charcoal of an old burn crept the bright frost-red leaves of wild strawberry plants, tangled up with the rain wet yellow leaves of cottonwoods" (Bass, 173). A scene that any nature calendar would drool over, and with about as much impact on Bass as if it had been on a calendar. "Without Colter, though, the beauty was only skin deep...there was that kick missing to it" (Bass, 173). Bass has come to analyze the nature of his magical relationship with the dog and the woods they hunted in only negatively, after the key element was removed, and the "kick" was gone. "I was not wired to Colter anymore...and I had never realized so fully – or rather so consciously, so analytically – how much the beauty of the woods depended on him" (Bass, 174). Bass has come to this realization only by self-examination over time, and so found the magic that can run through any situation, but never does so on command, like a light bulb.

He enjoyed, reveled in, the Montana woods in autumn, as anyone might do. What he was able to articulate was something of the nature of that enjoyment, a rare feat, perhaps possible because of the intensity of his enjoyment, a mania or an addiction. Perhaps it was also the lack of materialism in his pursuit, for he certainly did not hunt to kill or eat. He copiously details his inability to wield a shotgun proficiently. "I have shot a box of shells at pheasants before without hitting one" (Bass, 97). He doesn't even really seem to mind, except that it seems to disappoint the dog. This is an intense enjoyment of a solitary pursuit, for he emphasizes that while he hunts with friends as well, it is alone that he truly feels it a state of grace, one not enjoyed "amid humans" (Bass, 18). It is also one that has no material reward;

in fact, to indulge the habit he has moved to an isolated ranch in eastern Montana. These things may have brought the magic in the dog and the forest and the hunting into greater relief, because they flatly contradict routine, materialistic or utilitarian explanations. The woods are alive for Bass, and "electricity" cackles in the air between him and his dog. I do not believe that this is a particularly rare experience, quite the opposite. Although it is certainly not something that happens every single day, I believe that everyone is touched in this way, by the magical nature of the world. Only exceptional circumstances allow it to be articulated, allow us to examine the experience and what makes it special. It is too easy to glide through moments of grace, and remember them only with a twinge of bittersweet nostalgia later when they are gone, and the woods are not so sweet any more.

If the trinity he formed with his dog and the landscape was magically alive for Bass, cards, slot machines, and roulette wheels are equally alive for Frederick and Steven Barthelme. Their book *Double Down* is an account of gambling, and while the details, or the outcome, could not be more contrary to *Colter,* the experience is fundamentally the same, magical.

> We stared at the cards and sometimes, strange as it may seem, we felt we had some communication with them. There were times when we knew what the next card was going to be, and when the card was revealed it was precisely the card we expected. This happened far too often to be coincidence, accident, and chance. This was, at least, magic...many things about blackjack play and the running of the reels on slot machines do not lend themselves readily to analysis on conventional terms; that ordinary analysis is inadequate to explain completely what cards come up and when they come up and why they come up...(Barthelme, 135).

The Barthelmes are describing a magical experience, a belief that things are alive, things they can *communicate with.* Like Bass, their gambling habit provides a privileged window of opportunity to observe magic in action. The invisible epistemology that is magic is inherently closer to the surface in gambling because it so flatly contradicts more common

accounts of motive and meaning. There may be some professional gamblers, but the Barthelme's are not trying to join them, and recognize this fact, recognize that "it wasn't materialism' (Barthelme, 113). They approached their gambling methodically, thinking about it a lot, talking about it a lot, reading the reference books, and talking to other gamblers. They knew how money could be made playing blackjack. Anyone with some patience, and a lot of hard work, can learn to count cards well enough to do so. But "card counting made playing more like a job" and they "already had jobs" (Barthelme, 81). Instead it was about winning, winning money not because money could buy things, but because money was magical and alive. "Money was a being, a spiritual presence" (Barthelme, 113).

> There is a perfect alignment or echo between our experience in gambling and our experience of the world, and it is in the big win – a slot machine jackpot or a successful thousand dollar double down at the blackjack table – that this echo is most apparent. All the disorder, illogic, injustice, and pointlessness that we have spent our ordinary days ignoring and denying, pretending to see the same world our fellow citizens insist on seeing, trying to get along, trying not to think too much about the implications, all of it flows forth in confirmation of pointlessness – by luck. Yes, that is how it is, the blue thousand-dollar turtle looking symbols say (Barthelme, 96).

Gambling makes it apparent that at times, perhaps the most important times, we are not seeking to maximize utility. The Barthelmes were seeking to win, and to win money, but they were really only seeking that moment of magical confirmation, when money talked to them, when *the funny blue thousand-dollar turtle-looking symbols* tell them how it is. They lost several hundred thousand dollars over the course of two years, money they inherited when their parents died, but those losses did not in any way diminish their very real pleasure at a big win, because that big win was not about getting ahead. It was about "vindication...about beating logic...about chance confirming everything you knew but could

make no place for in your life" (Barthelme, 97). It was "nonsensical as love or cancer" (Barthelme, 92).

This is not to say that they recommend gambling to anyone. Like the experience of the sacred, the experience of magic is not *moral*. It can be good, or bad, or perhaps even lukewarm, although few are likely to write books about lukewarm magic. For Bass the experience led him into a place of beauty and light, but for the Barthelme brothers "something wicked was afoot," and they knew it (Barthelme, 80). They spend a great deal of time analyzing their own past, the relationship with their parents, and the way that relationship effected their own relationship with and conception of money. They look at the artifacts of the casino, the design of the slot machines with lights on top, "the chubby shrink-wrapped bags of quarters" that must be dumped in to finish paying off a big jackpot (Barthelme, 91). "Gambling is of course a very expensive way to beat reason" and they realize that you can achieve that same effect in an infinite number of different ways, ways that will not drain your bank accounts, put your future in jeopardy; "most anything'll do it, once you've shed your silly confidence" (Barthelme, 97).

These two books represent one rather extreme way to provide evidence for my thesis, that the nature of the everyday world is magical, that things are alive, that rituals and words have power. Simply take articulate people (writers by profession) who are also by nature introspective, and plop them down in extreme circumstances, places where the usual explanations no longer fit, where the epistemology that we usually present to the world as our motivation is so badly out of place that we are forced to admit its inadequacy. However, the Barthelmes and Bass have also done something more than that. Just as C.K. Williams believes, in poetic writing, what trendy MFA programs these days would call creative

nonfiction, we can find the beginnings of a *calculus of experience*, a way to quantify without numbers different kinds of experience or consciousness.

So far, the analysis I have presented continues the fault Williams called to the fore: I have left the magic out. Having told you they experienced magic, I have only shown the externals, what the magical experience was about, hunting and gambling respectively. Both books go much farther, however, and provide an embodied description of magic, with a depth and breadth of coverage that allows them to account for "the consciousness and emotional mechanisms" of that magic (Williams, 1). Watching the two dogs that he saved from that ruined shed, Bass tries "*to quantify the distance they had come*, from being at death's door in Mississippi to chewing on a moldering old elk skull outside the cabin in Montana" (Bass, 16). The difference in miles is meaningless, the difference in climate is meaningless, the temporal difference is meaningless, the distance Bass is trying to measure, knowing "that the difference for them was the same distance for me," is the distance between two kinds of experience, measured "in some units not yet know to man" (Bass, 15).

This is the crux of the dilemma for a Sociologist. The social sciences, for many reasons, have given analytic preeminence to measurements that can be quantified, and these measurements that Bass takes, that the Barthelme's take, are decidedly un-quantifiable, but they still suggest that in writing that knows it is writing, that does not cling to the phantom of objective scientific authority, a system can be drawn up to speak about the foreground of social life with precision and rigor. Sociology does not have to surrender this richest area of life and return to the background of demographics. To do this new analysis, this analysis that can grasp magic, that can talk to the *funny blue thousand-dollar turtle-looking symbols* and can see the "*spirit yet invisible to the word in the bond between people and dogs*", we must

address the body (Bass, 21). The distinctive moods, feelings and sensualities of embodied conduct are not merely personal or hopelessly ephemeral. By paying close attention to the details of the living present we can talk about differences in experience, the *subtle assuagements* with which *the landscape sculpt our hearts, our emotions; and from that catalyst, sometimes, our actions*. To ignore the differences in embodied conduct, in the way the personal and collective past (structure and agency to Sociologists) mix, is as grievous a fault as to ignore age, sex, and race. We can talk about magic. It is there, waiting for us, in the readily observable meanings of social action, a cup that brims over with analytic wealth beyond measure for any who wish to tap it.

That the Barthelmes describe their gambling as an addiction is no surprise, but it may offer an important clue as to the nature of magic that Bass also uses the term.

> It revved the dogs up, as well as us. The word *addiction* has such a negative ring to it; I suppose I should say that we were *more fully engaged* when hunting with them; *more intimately connected to the natural world.* But what an addiction it was (Bass, x).

Perhaps the nature of the magic has already been implicitly presented in the passage where he realized that even the most stunning natural beauty was just that, beautiful, without the dog whose magical relationship to his master had made it a luminous beauty. For Bass, the dog had sharpened the senses, he "creates, transcribes, a new landscape for you...and for a while, sometimes a long while, such a dog seems capable, by himself alone, of holding time in place – of pining it and holding it taut" (Bass, 168). Of course this isn't quite correct. The dog cannot do it alone, only in relationship to the man, because the experience of magic is always in relationship to someone, or something. But what Bass talks about as addiction and time standing still reflects the unique, transportive quality of magic as it is experienced. Magic is experienced, not employed. It makes everything "so sensate and crisp as to seem

beyond this life...felt more sharply, more intimately, and at a smoother, more supple pace" (Bass, xiii).

The Barthelmes also qualify the word addiction at the same time as they recognize it as such. "From childhood we had been taught that the object of an addiction was secondary...the quality of your interest rather than its object, that mattered" and quality was measured by "intensity" (Barthelme, 101). "Best was to surrender oneself to something habitually or obsessively" and when the something was "diet Coke and Russian writers, springer spaniels and computers, box wrenches and movies" then all is well. Because none of those things can take all your money and leave you with a need for more, and because "the only time you really think of yourself as an addict is when you want to stop" and Russian writers can pretty much go on indefinitely (Barthelme, 103). When Rick Bass described the pleasure, the unqualified pleasures, of his own magical experience he described it as a heightening of an already "halcyon life," that, "wonderful as my life is, come September, it is nonetheless an awakening" (Bass, xv). The Barthelme brothers have no such luck, as they are academics, although they don't have to worry about children one day finding out that the dog was the only thing that really made Daddy happy. Be that as it may, the Barthelmes are still struck by the contrast between their "friends and colleagues at the university" and the people they gambled beside at the casino, people who still "imagined something wonderful might happen, something that could change their lives" (Barthelme, 73). They found that despite the "purpose and high sentence and often considerable charm" of their colleagues, they understood the gamblers better, and perhaps preferred them in a way. The gamblers, themselves included, "were serious, not like academics but in the furious way that children are serious, concentrating on play, oblivious, intense, yet at ease" (Barthelme, 74).

When discussing the experience of the sacred, Rudolph Otto argues that "it contains a quite specific element or 'moment,' which sets it apart from 'the rational'...that it completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts" (Otto, 5). That is to say, an experience of a state, not the application of an idea, and as such cannot be directly defined, only invoked "by the use of metaphor and symbolic expressions, to make the states of mind we are investigating, ring out, as it were, of themselves" (Otto, 12). After they have told all they can of addiction and absorption, "a very cerebral, almost slow-motion activity" where "it's not whether you win or lose, it's that you *play*" they have one last strategy to convey their experience, their addiction, the dark side of magic (Barthelme 102, 120).

> If you're skeptical about winning and losing being so similar, take this test. Go to your nearest casino with a thousand dollars and buy ten black chips. Put the thousand in the betting circle at a blackjack table...if you win, leave the chips there...Repeat this until you lose. When you lose everything, move away from the table and dwell on what has happened. Don't be content with telling yourself how stupid you are...calling yourself names. Don't simply conclude that you were insane to follow these instructions, to take this test. Instead, dwell on how it felt. Go over it in your head, recalling every detail. Remember your breathing, the barely perceptible electricity vibrating in your hands, the twist in your neck and shoulders. Remember the current flowing through your body as you watched every card show...And most of all, once it's done, gently close your eyes, fade back, and feel it (Barthelme 102).

This is, of course, somewhat facetious, for the description of the test makes its execution somewhat redundant. Experience may be best, but the social sciences would grind to a halt if we all had to go try something before writing about it. Instead these two accounts expand the boundaries of the magical experience at the same time as they demonstrate a methodological perspective for talking about it.

Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, first published in 1917, was an early reaction to the seeming inability of naturalistic science to grasp or explain spiritual experience. Although he

is sometimes less than gentle with non-religious forms, he does link the sacred with a wider category of magical or supernatural experience. The experience of the holy or numinous is like a "dread of ghosts" or "the feeling of something uncanny" as the development of all "daemons and gods alike...and all products of mythological apperception or fantasy are nothing but different modes in which it has been objectified" (Otto, 15). Otto makes two important points with respect to the current case. First, he argues that the sacred, as it is experienced, and as it was originally defined, contained no element of morality. Rather, when an individual experiences "the holy" it is as a particular "state of mind" (Otto, 7). In other words, magic may call us to activities with positive or negative consequences, as is evinced by the contrast between Bass and the Barthelmes. Secondly, Otto makes clear that the holy is experienced as a power "objective and outside the self" (Otto, 11). This concerns again the central paradox of the magical experience, the feedback loop. In both cases it is clear that the magic is "manufactured." Slot machines are not designed for efficiency. If so they'd all look like ATM machines. Instead they look like "some East Egg picnic of folk in dandy white clothes" except they have flashing lights on top (Barthelme, 92). When you hit a big jackpot "somebody is thinking all this stuff up, choreographing it – the machine running out, the light on top, the jargon," but you don't care (Barthelme, 91). In fact, the gambler has also helped to engineer it; feed enough bills in and you're guaranteed to hit some sort of jackpot eventually. It's the disconnect between what we do to start the loop, feed a token into the slot machine, and what the machine does in return that makes it magic.

These two works have taken me from what magic is ("we stared at the cards...we felt we had some communication with them") to how magic is experienced ("lights are glistening, everything's brighter than before") as sensual knowledge. They have shown how poetic

writing can "quantify the distance" from one kind of experience to another, even if only in "units of measurement not yet known to man." They have shown that we can go beyond specifying the object of a magical experience and speak to the nature of the experience, and by doing so perhaps come to better understand who we are.

GUMMI BEARS, TEDDY GRAHAMS, AND ANIMAL CRACKERS: SYMPATHETIC MAGIC AND CORPORATE VOODOO

> And God said, let us make man in our own image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth.
> -Genesis 1:26

When I was a child, even more a child than I am now, I had many books, and many were filled with animals. There were talking cows, and Hippos in bathing suits, and Bear Families that lived in trees, dressed in clothes, and went to school. Living in the house with me was a dog, whose ears I shouldn't pull, a cat who slept with me, and a big tank full of fish. There were zoos and parks, and museums, with gorillas and squirrels and natural history dioramas. Animals were clearly a good thing. We liked animals, we loved some of the animals. In fact, my parent's fondness for them may explain my birth, the best pet of them all. Then one day, and nobody remembers exactly how, I heard reference to the *eating* of animals. I was shocked. I was also two years old, but it ran contrary to everything I knew about other living things. I ate *meat*, of course I ate meat, but meat doesn't come from *animals*! That's not funny. And why should a two year old associate meat with animals? Animals are fury or scaly and run around and bark, and meat comes from packages in the refrigerator.

"We don't eat animals." (scornful, indignant).

"Neil, don't you know where meat comes from?"

"Why?" (distrustful, nervous).

"Meat is food we get from animals."

"No it's not. Meat is not an animal. Why do we call it 'meat' then?" Why would it have a different name?

"We eat cows. Beef is from cows. Hamburger is from cows." (The transformation from animal to food is effected through naming, a common device of magic and ritual)

"We don't eat cows. Why would we call cows hamburger?" (This is good logic)

"We eat pigs. Pork is from pigs. Ham is from pigs. (How can you pierce the magic barricade?).

"We don't eat pigs. Why would we call pigs ham? (Still, it's good logic)

"Chicken is from chicken. We eat chicken."

"We don't eat . . ." (Sadly for me, we call a chicken a chicken, alive or dead. The curtain opens, the magic lost. We eat animals. *I* had eaten animals.)

I was discovered one night in the kitchen, crying, a large ham in my hands, throwing away all the meat in the house. I must have gotten over it, because today I eat meat as cheerfully as anyone, but where did that change come from? Children's books and other media are often explicitly designed to enculturate, many seem to carry a message that would see each human as a "plain member and citizen . . .with respect for the community as such" and not as a "conqueror of the land-community" (Leopold, 204). The conscious, declared ideology presented to children is not representative of the worldview most people eventually adopt. What is the actual worldview, and where does it come from?

Aldo Leopold is one of many critics to argue that society needs a "land ethic," a value system with a critical understanding of ecology that can supplement and complement "land-use ethics" that "are still governed wholly by economic self-interest" (Leopold, 209). The problem, as he recognizes, is that "nothing so important as an ethic is ever 'written" rather it

evolves "in the minds of a thinking community" (Leopold, 225). No small group of people, no matter how well organized, or what offices they hold, can impose an *ethic* "without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions" (Leopold, 210). This is also a major theme in David Korten's *The Post-Corporate World*, that "we each organize our knowledge into a personal image of the world, which serves as a kind of map in guiding our behavior" (Korten, 3).

This idea, which he credits to Kenneth Boulding, guides Korten's understanding of the possibilities for institutional change; "our collective choice of the *big* story by which societies define the nature of reality and their relationship to it makes a *very big* difference in how societies organize themselves and define their goals" (Korten, 9). He argues that the old/current big story is based on Newtonian Physics, the model that modern science has used to produce a big picture, and due to the preeminence of science, the model that "global society has come to be defined by" as well (Korten, 104). This was a model "of human behavior and social organization that embraces hedonism as the goal and measure of human progress, assumes human behavior is motivated solely by material self-interest" and removes "morality as a criterion for economic behavior" (Korten, 27).

More succinctly, the big death picture model involves "the absolute domination of money as the organizing principle of human and international relations" (Korten, 21). Likewise, human relations with the rest of the biota are governed by "the presence or absence of economic advantage" (Leopold, 211). How do we change the current model to the lovely new option? Leopold explicitly argues that changes must be made in the *content* of conservation education, not just the volume, and that these changes must teach individuals

that "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community" and wrong otherwise (Leopold, 224-5).

This is a noble sentiment, and a good thing to teach, but it omits a critical dimension. Both Leopold and Korten have forgotten their Marx, forgotten that "just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself" our opinion of a system of social organization should not be based on its own stated beliefs. Leopold does assume the outlook is grim, "our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of the land" (Leopold, 223). However, the mechanism he identifies for "any ethic" is overly simplistic, "social approbation for right actions, social disapproval for wrong actions" (Leopold 225). Likewise, Korten supposes the death science system *both* believes in and operates "according to fixed physical laws knowable through observation, measurement, and mathematical calculation" (Korten, 25).

> That which cannot be observed and measured, such as spirit and consciousness, came to be excluded from consideration by science . . .from the scientists perspective does not exist . . . a culture of science that limits the boundaries of acceptable inquiry . . . We are caught between the belief system of our scientific culture and the conflicting data of our daily experience. (Korten, 25, 28).

They are quite right in assuming this is how scientists, philosophers, and thinkers view the big picture, but they are wrong to assume that this understanding also described the way the social system works and recreates itself. Korten is largely correct when he says that the dominant scientific paradigm does not recognize that which it cannot observe directly, including consciousness, and more importantly, the unconscious. Karen Armstrong, in *A History of God*, argues that this Enlightenment paradigm of "death science" devalued Religion as an organizing principle of daily life because "it educates us to focus our attention on the physical and material world . . . many of us no longer have the sense that we are

surrounded by the unseen" (Armstrong, 4). However, just because we have been consciously trained to believe we are no longer enthralled by invisible forces, does not mean that we have actually banished such forces! To the contrary, they are even more potent for being unremarked.

In other words, the current un-ecologically sound social system will resist change through vastly more subtle means than "approbation for approved actions." Rather, actions that seem unrelated to ecology or economics may determine attitudes, and so actions that do relate to ecology. Rational empiricism is a tool of capitalism, but capitalism is not a product of rational empiricism. To find the sources of the perpetuation of the current model of life, we have to consider that earlier models of the world, officially and perhaps consciously rejected, still operate on the unconscious level and play a key role in determining social behaviors.

For many in the pre-modern world, Sympathetic Magic was a powerful and vital force, not like the pale shadows that remain, openly, today, psychic detectives, palm readers, and the like. Rather,

> When people began to devise their myths and worship their gods, they were not seeking a literal explanation for natural phenomena. The symbolic stories, cave paintings and carvings were an attempt to express their wonder and to link this pervasive mystery with their own lives. These myths were not intended to be taken literally, but were metaphorical attempts to describe a reality that was too complex and elusive to express in any other way. (Armstrong 5)

Capitalism is resilient and malleable, a mutant terror at adapting and subverting, so it should come as no real surprise if this primal expression of human spirituality has also been co-opted to help perpetuate the current paradigm. Any contemporary mention of sympathetic magic however, quickly moves to a caveat like this:

> Anthropologists consider magical thinking a precursor to scientific thinking . . . Such thinking may seem charming when done by our ancestors living thousands of years ago, but today such thinking may indicate a profound ignorance or indifference towards science and a testable understanding of the world. (Carroll)

This is typical, patronizing and arrogant, certain that anything not empirically measurable cannot exist, and yet, there are many anomalies, and those anomalies may help explain to children that while we love certain animals, others are bound for the slaughterhouse. For instance, have you ever wondered about Animal Crackers, Gummi Bears, Teddy Grahams, Hello Panda ("tasty biscuits with a chocolate flavored creme filling") and Strawberry Koala Yummies ("Filled Snack Cookies"), about all the snacks that come shaped like certain animals, and never like others? Certainly no one chooses to make crackers and candy into certain animals to enculturate children ("*Well Snidley, sales in the meat department are down, it seems children these days want fruits and vegetables." "I know sir! We'll sell them fruit snacks shaped like little steaks and burgers! They'll be begging their parents to buy more meat.*"), but think of the animal depicted. They are not random. They are almost all *protected* species, animals offering no direct economic value. There are very few farm animals and even fewer pets (at least animals that qualify in this country as such). P.T. Barnum's Animal Crackers, Endangered Species Animal Crackers, Small World Animal Grahams, Nabisco Marine Animal Crackers, and Zoo Animal Crackers. Tellingly, several of these brands outwardly position themselves as Eco-friendly, giving away passes to Aquariums in conjunction with the American Zoo & Aquarium Association and contributing to the World Wildlife Fund, but the encoded message can be read by the way even the manufacturers expect them to be consumed.

The New York Times asked Nabisco product manager Greg Price if there wasn't "something weird about eating these near-sacred animals" when the Endangered Species line came out. He replied: "Of course, what do people like about Animal Crackers? Biting off the heads! Our hope was that children will line them up, match them up with the names on the box, learn about them, and then decapitate them" ("Off With Their Heads," 95). *"Look Mommy, I found a Bactrian Camel!" **CRUNCH** "Look Mommy, I bite the head off a Bactrian Camel."* Another web site offered up a game for children, Animal Cracker Combat:

> Instructions:
> 1.Acquire a box of animal crackers.
> 2.Shake box well (if you are a small child, you have probably already done this).
> 3.Wagers may be taken at this point, where legal. Note: we do not recommend this in games involving small children.
> 4.Each player should remove one animal cracker. If you are playing alone, remove two.
> 5.Determine which animal would win a fight. For example: would the headless lion win against the zebra missing two legs?
> 6.Rules for determining the winner are open to many variations. See below.
> 7.The **losing animal** (cracker) should be **eaten first**.
> 8.Return to step three (*until there are no more animal* crackers, then return to step one). *(my emphasis)* (Animal Cracker Combat).

This is clearly not congruent with an ecologically enlightened understanding of the animal kingdom, especially the endangered parts. In a new novel, Kurt Anderson has children popping mint flavored Prozac, watching Charles Manson parole hearings live, and eating Endangered Species Animal Crackers. Kirkus Reviews called it "a generous bonanza of comic near-future concepts" and the SeattleWeekly.Com described it as "an exaggerated picture of a possible world." Given that the first Endangered Crackers showed up in 1991 lets hope the rest of the novel got real wacky.

Similar themes show up in the Gummi industry. The Trolli website offered this product description:

> Did you know that Trolli introduced the first Gummi worm in 1981 and now they are the most popular Gummi food? The average Brite Crawler is two inches long. *Just the right size to bit the head off*! Did you know that worms in Ecuador grow to be eight feet long? Imagine what a Brite Crawler that size would taste like. Guess what happens when an octopus gets scared? It blends in with the environment so you can't see it. Good thing that doesn't happen to the Trolli Octopus *or you would have a hard time eating it.* (Trolli)

Bears, Dolphins, Sharks, Rattle Snakes, Dinosaurs, Tarantula, Rats, Crocodiles, Frogs, Crocodiles and even Animal Cracker Gummis all show up. But not once did I find anything like,

> The average Great Dane puppy grows to 150 pounds. Imagine what a Trolli Puppy that size would taste like! Guess what happens when you rub a kitten's belly? They roll over trustingly and meow. Good thing Trolli kittens don't do that, it would make them hard to eat!

However, "theatergoers who were terrified by the man-eating dinosaurs in Spielberg productions hit film Jurassic Park can retaliate by chewing on *Gummie Dinosaurs*" ("Keeping Dinosaurs Under Control," 118). Goeelitz Candy Company calls their products "Gummi Pets," but this includes Ricky Rattler Pet Gummi Snack, "an Australian saltwater Pet Crocodile" a life-size "Pet tarantula" and a nine inch "Pet Rat," animals only referred to as pets when we can consume them. In fact, both Gummi and Cracker snacks include a remarkable number of animals that are considered undesirable, predators, vermin, or just economically worthless, found only in circuses and zoos. A review in the Phoenix New Times emphasizes the affective relationship we have with these candies:

> Aesthetically speaking, we like these bears. The colors are soothing, tranluscent pastels--celery, baby blue, pale pink--and the bears appear friendly, reaching for a hug. (Phoenix New Times)

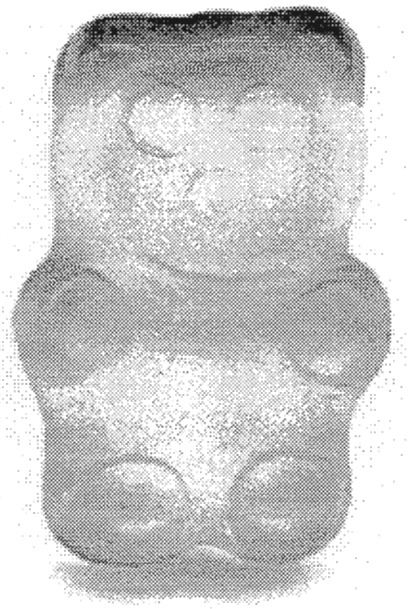

Figure 2. The Trolli Gummi Bear

Of course they aren't going to get a hug, they're gonna get their heads ripped off. The Trolli Gummi Bear reminds me of a stone idol, emphasizing the symbolic implications of their consumption. See Figure Two

To reinforce the theme of consumption and use-value, the latest line of Gummi candies include Gummi Pizzas, Gummi Cheeseburgers, and Gummi Coke Bottles. Fast food, the most powerful symbol of American consumer culture, sold as Gummis by Trolli, because "Trolli is all about having fun." Nabisco's official company history emphasized that sales increased when animal shapes were made more distinct and recognizable. The basic appeal of Gummi as a product is the protean mutability of the material. "Shapes are molding today's gummi sector" which has "evolved into a virtual Noah's Ark of animal and other fun to eat shapes, including frogs, worms, octopi, burgers, rings, tongues, watches and even pizzas...now you can have virtually any shape you can conceive" ("Gummi Wars," 40). It's

hard to believe that we could feed children this way and imagine it would not effect their later attitudes and actions toward the natural world. There are other precedents; recent protests against candy cigarettes, found to positively impact children's attitudes toward the desirability of smoking.

In a series of caves in the Pyrenees archeologists discovered dramatic paintings, of animals caught in motion. This is believed to be the earliest evidence of a belief in sympathetic magic.

> Perhaps the most familiar application of the principle that like produces like is the attempt which has been made by many peoples in many ages to injure or destroy an enemy by injuring or destroying an image of him, in the belief that, just as the image suffers, so does the man. Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*

There is evidence that the Paleolithic artists who painted the animals on the cave wall saw it this way, as many images had spears thrown at them, indicating "a strong identification between a living being and its image" (Jaffe, 261). The symbolic hunting of the painting represented the wishes, desires and understanding of the painter about the proper place for animals. The symbolic consumption of animals by American children today should not be considered less weighty. Perhaps conflict arises when effort and resources are expended to preserve parts of the natural world that have no economic use value. They are symbolically consumed as candy. In fact, almost all the animals represented fall into somebody's better off dead category. Perhaps wolves are never represented because, until very recently, wolves were in fact a vanquished species, as if we only need to symbolically consume animals that we cannot exterminate. Tellingly, the only human being I found represented was Gummi Bill Clinton, and when you apply the wolf versus bear model, this makes a certain sense. After all, many people would like to exterminate him as well, but have been remarkably

unsuccessful so far. Can't hunt the Bears in Yellowstone, can't kill all the sharks in the ocean, can't impeach Bill Clinton, but we can symbolically consume them, sympathetic magic and voodoo alive and well in our rational empirical society. Candy, crackers, and cookies become both a symbolic method of consumption and a perpetuation of the paradigm. Man gave names to all the animals and naming something has always imparted a unique kind of power, often the power to destroy. Every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth had better beware; I don't love animals anymore.

WHEN NAMES ATTACK

> Unable to discriminate clearly between words and things, the savage commonly fancies that the link between a name and the person or thing denominated by it is not a mere arbitrary and ideal association, but a real and substantial bond which unites the two in such a way that magic may be wrought on a man just as easily through his name as through his hair, his nails, or any other material part of his person. In fact, primitive man regards his name as a vital portion of himself and takes care of it accordingly. Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*.

Another way to understand name magic, especially if you disregard the contemptuous dismissal Frazer gives it, is as a folk theory of mimesis. An understanding of the relationship between words and the objects they refer to that believes, as Michael Taussig put it, that the representation is "contiguous with that being represented and not suspended above and distant from the represented" (Taussig, 10). Typically theories of mimesis are only concerned with cultural products, the way human actions are depicted in literature and art. Erich Aurebach, in the classic book on the subject, writes about changing modes of representation of reality in western literature for instance. However, name magic is particularly significant because it grounds the mimetic practice in everyday behavior, the way individuals construct and create the social world through representations, through words, and for my purposes, through the creative use of pronouns.

A significant proportion of my time on this project has been occupied with reading those who believe the social sciences lack adequate methodologies and epistemologies of mimesis, that we are not capable of rendering important aspects of social life. This is both a very new and a very old critique. A great deal of what is classified as post-modern theory is occupied in some way with the inadequacies of current methods of representing reality. However, the authors mentioned also hark back to much earlier criticisms of science, like

that of William James who argued that any serious description of human reality had to account for both what we experience and how we experience it, "a conscious field *plus* its object as felt or thought *plus* an attitude towards the object *plus* the sense of self to whom the attitude belongs" (James, 377). To simply concentrate on the object, without concern for the nature of the experiences is, as James puts it, is "like a beautiful picture of an express train supposed to be moving, but where in the picture...is the energy or the fifty miles an hour" (James, 379). This criticism is often rooted in an objection to reification, and the complementary inability to convincingly depict the living present. For Jack Katz this is the contrast between the "background" of demographic detail and the "foreground" of experience. For C.K. Williams this is the contrast between our ability to describe the external features of consciousness and emotion and the "surprisingly small number of terms to describe or embody them" (Williams, 1). Avery Gordon turns to Raymond Williams, and his "structure of feeling," as a way to avoid the "treatment of a vibrant pulsating living present as an inert past tense" (Gordon, 198).

Significantly, none of these criticisms denies our fundamental ability to know the social world. Katz believes that "a systematic empirical theory of crime" can grow out of epistemological reform" (Katz 1988, 312). Gordon argues for "a different way of knowing and writing about the social world" that could "expand the domain of the empirical considerably" (Gordon, 21). Williams believes that poetry can describe the embodied experience of emotion "with great precision and rigor" (Williams, 4). This is a criticism filled with great hope. Yes, it may be true that our current methods estrange us from those elements of social life that are truly important, but we can change. Sociology has always vacillated between the positivistic methods of the natural sciences and the hermeneutic

methods of the literary model and it an overweening reliance on the former that has rendered the immediate world of lived reality invisible.

Perhaps this problem has endured for so long because its failings are rendered inconsequential to so many by the literal and rhetorical distance sociologists tend to maintain between themselves and the objects of their analysis. It is hard to become overly concerned with an inadequate depiction of the people of Melanesian Islands. They are very far away, and we will probably never meet them. It is very hard to become particularly agitated at a flawed depiction of our fellow countrymen because they have been rendered rhetorically distant, subject to social laws that the analyst sits outside of and comments on. One way to bring home the immediacy of the problem, to make more viscerally real the need to improve methodologically, is to imagine yourself as the object of such analysis.

This is the possibility that both frightens and intrigues Virginia Woolf, when she imagines the biographer. She is intrigued, because she wishes to write biography, and she is frightened because she understands that biography often fails in the same way as social theory:

> Consider one's own life; pass under review a few years that one has actually lived. Conceive how Lord Morley would have expounded them; how Sir Sidney Lee would have documented them; how strangely all that has been most real in them would have slipped through their fingers. Nor can we name the biographer whose art is subtle and bold enough to present that queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow. (Woolf 1958, 155)

Her objections are both real and rhetorical, as she is especially thinking about her own attempts at rendering life through words, but it touches on an important point for my own project. In the image of a "perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow" her version of the real preserves the interaction between the solid, material objects and events of daily life

and the way that those are experienced. She was not privileging a life of the mind over the concrete facts, dates, places, and events of the traditional 19th century biography, rather she was suggesting that it is in the combination of these elements that "we catch the real fact in the making and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done" (James, 379). There are of course of whole multitude of complementary answers to this challenge has she laid down, and in her own work sociology might find more subtle means of rendering the social world. I want to suggest that in the private and professional writings of Virginia Woolf we can describe the way name magic functions as a mimetic tool by which individuals can constitute themselves and their own conceptions of others through the social practice of naming.

If the modern occultist errors in their understanding of name magic it is in assuming that language is innocent and simply reflects a deep inner core of personality, be it of a person, place, or thing. Monika Dunn, a proponent of acrophonolgy, believes that "a name is the identification not only of a physical body, but also of the soul's use of this personality vehicle" (Dunn). This view comes much closer, but a miss is as good as a mile. Both the sociologist and the occultist understand names as signifiers of deeper constructs. You can learn who you *really* are by examining your name, you can learn what a corporation is *really* all about by examining their product names. Other occultists understand that "there is power in your name" and that by changing your name "you can effect an energy or personality change... stage names, maiden names, marriage names, pen names, pseudonyms, and nicknames all serve a purpose" (Dunn). Robert Todd Carroll from the Skeptics Dictionary (Skeptic's Dictionary) quotes text from a Kabalarian group:

> Your name determines your every experience. It defines your personal strengths and weaknesses both mentally and physically. *It interprets your whole nature.* It shows your position in life and your measure of success or failure, When you are named your destiny is created. (emphasis added, Skeptic's Dictionary).

This comes much, much closer to the truth of name magic, but falls to another fallacy of sociology and the occult, by attributing the power of the magic to external, universal forces and portrays them as un-problematic. Name magic is heterogeneous, and based in social action. Names do not describe personality, be it personality of people, organizations, or objects. Rather naming is a social process, always a negotiation between parties about which names will be used, which is to say a negotiation about who we are. A name is obviously something far greater than a tool for identification, although it is also that. It is a reflexive process that is never absolute. Sometimes a name comes loaded with meaning that channel its bearer, and other times a name can arrive without meaning, but develop significance, including new meaning for groups and time periods far beyond those immediately effected. Sometimes neither of these things happen, or both.

Virginia Woolf was an ardent bestower and user of nicknames, not just for other people, but different nicknames for herself depending on who she was talking (or more likely writing) to. These nicknames were often animal-inspired and they set the tone for her relationships. Here is a brief excerpt of a letter to her cousin and frequent correspondent, Emma Vaughan:

> Dearly beloved Toad,
>
> This morning we heard from Susan Lushington that she arrives on Monday at Huntingdon....This all flowed from my lips without my desire or knowledge. I meant only to be short and businesslike. Poor Toad – when you come I shall say to you – Have you read my letter – And you will confess that you did try a bit on the road and you really do mean to have another shot on the way back. And you are only waiting for a rainy day to finish it altogether. Augusta thinks it bad for your eyesight and Marny has telegraphed "Forbid you to read Virginias letters." I am a little cracky this

> afternoon, it's the hottest day I have yet lived thro'. I have read a whole long novel through; beginning at breakfast this morning at ending at 4 p.m.
> It is now tea time. (Thank Heavens, Toadus inquit)
> I am very sorry to have written such a long letter, but I will write a digest in very black ink so as to make up.
> Love to dear Marny and all my nieces and nephew.
>
> Yr always, Goatus
>
> (Woolf 1975, 27)

Virginia was genuinely fond of her cousin. The somewhat biting tone of the letter ("Some other people – toads I should say – nasty slimy crawling things") is really a form of good-natured teasing. It is important, however, that Virginia directed her mock criticism at the nickname. The use of names in this way is what allows the correspondents to bridge a gulf, to allow communication to overcome insecurity and self-consciousness. Virginia was nicknamed "Goat" by her family at a young age, but she quickly adopted it, and used it in corresponding with a particular group of friends who she liked but felt distanced from by cultural or intellectual interests. "From the first she was felt to be incalculable, eccentric, and prone to accidents" and when family members called her the goat, it was not just a reflection of her eccentricities. It was "the seal on this character" that allowed for things that Virginia Adelie Stephens could not do or talk about otherwise (Lee, 111). When writing to her down-to-earth cousin *Virginia* could not say,

> You don't see the sky until you live here. We have ceased to be dwellers on the earth. We are really made of clouds. We are mystical and dreamy and perform fugues on the Harmonium (Woolf 1975, 27)

but the Goat certainly could, without fearing either ridicule on her part or embarrassment on her cousins. She, writing as the Goat, can simply say "You must read my work carefully – not missing my peculiar words – and then tell me your criticisms and humble thanks" (Woolf 1975, 28).

Hermione Lee, who details this totem menagerie in her biography of Woolf, believes that "the nicknames give permission for aberrant behavior" on the part of the bearer, and for Virginia were part of a process by which "everyone she knew would be reinvented and taken possession of by a nickname" (Lee, 109). Her relationship with her sister Vanessa was by nature a very different beast than with her cousin, and a more important one. So important that it a whole menagerie of "pleading greedy creatures she kept in play all through their correspondence" (Lee, 110). For this relationship the nicknames licensed a very different kind of behavior, as is evidenced in this letter of congratulation to Vanessa following her marriage:

> We have been your humble Beasts since we first left our Isles, which is before we can remember, and during that time we have wooed you and sung many songs of winter and summer and autumn in the hope that thus enchanted you would condescend one day to marry us. But as we no longer expect this honour we entreat that you keep us still for your lovers...Her devoted Beasts Billy Bartholemew Mungo and WOMBAT. (Woolf 1989, 38).

In writing to these two very different relatives, Woolf adopts two very different identities, both channeled through a different nickname. For Vanessa the nicknames are a way to plea for attention that would seem desperately unseemly (or even more unseemly than it does) if done with her everyday social face, the one that answers to Virginia. It would be easy enough to believe that these relationships developed, and that the nicknames were invented to describe an already formed reality, but this radically underestimates the naming process, the name magic, which *gives permission* and *licenses* behaviors and identities.

Woolf describes this same process in the short story "Lappin and Lapinova," which gives the necessary corollary to the process laid out above. If names successfully used can give permission for an identity, than the denial of a name can refuse that permission.

Rosalind, a very Virginia-esque character, has just married Ernest Thorton and is having a hard time adjusting, "Ernest was a difficult name to get used to" (Woolf 1972, 68). Sitting at breakfast, thinking, "he did not look like an Ernest" anyway, she notices his nose twitching while he ate his toast, and thought, "he looked like a rabbit" (Woolf 1972, 68). She explains to Ernest that he is a rabbit, "a hunting rabbit, a King Rabbit, a rabbit that makes laws for all the other rabbits" and as he had no objection to being this kind of rabbit it became his pet name. Feeling that plain old rabbit was not enough, and that Bunny "was someone plump and soft and comic," she finally hit upon King Lappin (French for rabbit) and she would be Lapinova. "They were opposite of each other; he was bold and determined she was wary and undependable" but in their nicknames "possessed a private world" that made "them feel, more even than most young married couples, in league together against the rest of the world" (Woolf 1972, 71). However, at some indeterminate point in the future, as Rosalind is having something like a nervous breakdown ("she felt as if her body had shrunk...her eyes seemed to burst out of her head, like currants in a bun") she begins to have trouble recapturing her alter-ego (Woolf 1972, 77). "It's Lapinova...She's gone, Ernest. I've lost her" she tells her husband, perhaps in lieu of trying to explain a nervous breakdown in other terms (Woolf 1972, 78). "Caught in a trap," he said, "killed," and sat down and read the newspaper. So that was the end of that marriage" (Woolf 1972, 78).

As the story suggests, when the names are denied or prohibited, behaviors are effected and identities changed. The name is not simply the marker, identifying an already present quality, rather they are the mimetic method by which social reality is both described and created. They are ultimately a form of *metaphor*, deployed, as metaphor always is, to create magical connections.

In her introduction to *Illuminations*, a collection of Walter Benjamin's essays, Hannah Arendt gives some idea of the importance of metaphor for understanding Benjamin's work and his theoretical position:

> Since Homer the metaphor has borne that element of the poetic which conveys cognition; its use establishes the correspondences between physically most remote things- as when in the *Iliad* the tearing onslaught of fear and grief on the hearts of the Achaians corresponds to the combined onslaught of the winds from north and west on the dark waters.. . Metaphors are the means by which the oneness of the world is poetically brought about. . . the metaphor as the greatest gift of language. Linguistic 'transference' enables us to give material form to the invisible--'A mighty fortress is our God'--and thus to render it capable of being experienced.

The metaphor is a way of making invisible process and structures both visible and visceral. Not only does it expose the previously hidden dimensions of social life, but by understanding the way the metaphor works when individual actors write the fiction of their lives, we understand how "the tangled exchange of noisy silences and seething absences" act both affectively and physically (Gordon, 200). This implies that we must take the metaphors used to describe social experience much more seriously, especially the metaphors and vocabulary of magic, because what subject is more concerned with giving invisible social structures material form? This is an insight that has already been deployed in part by Jack Katz, in *How Emotions Work.* He writes, "*I take subjects' metaphors seriously* as providing elements of explanation" because "at the most fundamental level of emotional experience and conduct, there is no nonmetaphoric, nonfigurative, "literal" level of reality to address" (Katz, 1999, 10). Benjamin goes on to describe the mode of apprehension that accompanies this recognition of similarity, "as the coherence of words and sentences is he bearer through which, like a flash, similarity appears" (Benjamin 1978, 335). Moreover, similarity can appear though non-textual reading as well; "to read what was never written. Such reading is

the most ancient: reading prior to all languages, from entrails, the stars, or dances" (Benjamin 1999, 722). Similarity and metaphor can, "like a flame, manifest itself only through a bearer" (Benjamin 1978, 335).

A recent example of the sometimes wayward, magical power of names is the controversy over the word picnic. Although it had been floating around the Internet for some indeterminate amount of time, this particular problem didn't really come to light until some eastern university tried to have a picnic in honor of Jackie Robinson, and civil rights in general. This is when members of the black student union at said university got angry, because they had encountered an etymology for the word picnic like this one:

> The word "picnic" is rooted from the whole theme of "Pick A Nigger". This is where individuals would "pic" a Black person to lynch and make this into a family gathering. There would be music and a "picnic". ("nic" being the white acronym for "nigger"). We should choose to use the word "barbecue" or "outing" instead of the word "picnic". (Picnic web page)

Etymologically speaking this is, of course, ridiculous. Picnic is French in origin, picque-nique, and originally referred to some sort of French pot-luck type of social gathering, and came to refer to outdoor entertainment in English during the 19th century. There are no sources that document racial connotations to the word. However, Jeff Nunberg, a linguist at Palo Alto, gave a much more nuanced reading of the issue, on NPR of all places. Nunberg's argument was basically that the syllable trumps the etymology every time. Picnic is by no means the only word that this is true of; a Washington D.C. official was famously fired for using the word niggardly in a budget report. The word is actually of Scandinavian origin, but as Nunberg points out, how can you really use words like this and not be aware of their phonetic connections? When Jello Biafra refers to former President Nixon as, not Richard, but Dick, everybody knows why that's funny, or at least supposed to be funny. The

television show "Beavis and Butthead" was built on this logic, and yet somehow because we understand the phenomena in its frivolous incarnation we are able to dismiss it from consideration otherwise. I would suggest that this engagement with syllables runs deeply through most social interactions, though not always as a matter of intentional planning, as the picnic example shows: No one called it a picnic to deliberately conjure up other word associations, but this is often a factor when naming something, ask any ad agency.

Consider the acronym, the name within a name. Acronyms are a clear case where meaning runs both ways. Complicated names are chosen to produce an acronym that can be manipulated into a syllable that has a desirable meaning, the Seattle Homeless Adolescent Runaway Enterprise is a hideously unwieldy name chosen only to produce the syllable SHARE on their letterhead. However, descriptive names also become acronyms out of abbreviation convenience and then those previously meaningless syllables acquire meaning; KGB, CIA, NAZI. When we use these or any other meaning-drenched syllables we are using what Walter Benjamin called "the magical function of the alphabet: to provide the non-sensuous similarity with the enduring semiotic ground on which it can appear" (Benjamin 1999, 718). Names are much more than identification, they are much more than vessels for expression. Language, through names, performs what Benjamin would call both a semiotic and a mimetic function. Semiotically, names do function to identify, language does work as a functional, communicative tool. However, he also believed that language was the highest form of the mimetic ability available to humans, maintaining "that experience rests on the ability to produce and perceive similarities" (Tiedemann, 934). When the "name" NAZI is used other than to refer to a far-right German political party of the middle of 20th century, it is being used to invoke the grossest kind of mimetic understanding.

Syllables demonstrate a more general aspect of name magic, the way meanings that are the collective property of a society can appear in names outside of any communicative purpose, but it is equally true that individuals may have intensely personal engagements with particular names. In a short essay called "Agesilaus Satander" (suggested to be an anagram for Der Angel Satanas), unpublished in his lifetime, Walter Benjamin also wrote about secret names. He claims Jewish parents sometimes gave their children secret names revealed "only when the children reach maturity" (Benjamin 1999, 714). The source and the secrecy of this name thus imposes "its transformation at a stroke" but is "by no means an enrichment of the person it designates. On the contrary, much of his image falls away when the name is heard" (Benjamin 1999, 714). This is not to say that anyone can attack another's self-image on a whim, simply be renaming them, although this is at the heart of the impulse to "call people names;" it is only when the name is accepted as legitimate that it has power. Sociologically, this is a powerful concept because it is eminently relational. Meaning and identity are not given or unchanging characteristics, but like all spells have to be recast over and over again.

Names limit, but names also give permission. They are not unproblematic labels, but identity-creating bearers of meaning and understanding. To undertake a sociology of names is to examine the sources of legitimacy for bestowing names, and to understand names as both causes and effects. This position rests upon an assumption that personality, at least in part, is not only expressed, but also created in social action. When we are moved by name magic we feel as if transcendent forces change us, transform our core, but this transcendent power is embedded in social action. Those who have the power to name have the power to control minds, even if this power is not always exercised deliberately or even consciously.

Name magic is, as William James described religious belief, "not merely apparently, but literally true" (James, 387).

HARRY POTTER IN A PIXIES T-SHIRT: MAGIC AS REDEFINITION OF DIFFERENCE

"Could you believe me if I said I'd been right out of the world – outside this world-last hols?'

'I wouldn't know what you meant.'

"Well, don't let's bother about worlds then. Supposing I told you I'd been in a place where animals can talk and where there are-er-enchantments and dragons-and-well, all sorts of things you have in fairy tales.' Scrubb felt terribly awkward as he said this and got red in the face.

'How did you get there?' said Jill. She also felt curiously shy.

'The only way you can—by **Magic**"

C.S. Lewis — *The Silver Chair*

The Orphan in Children's Literature

And for what remains a significant proportion of my life, I did believe him, and deep down I, like others perhaps, have never really given up wishing I could get to Narnia, to Middle-Earth, to Earthsea. Always hoping that I could find a door in an old house I'd never seen before, a magic ring tucked away waiting for me, a different world hidden deep within a forest, —that I would suddenly be able to understand and converse with the birds. Children's literature is infused with magic. Fans of *Winnie the Pooh* or *The Indian in the Cupboard* will not be surprised to hear that common everyday objects are alive. However, what I want to examine is Fantasy, a more particular sub-genre of children's literature, aimed at a slightly older, predominantly male, audience. This is a grand old genre, with many distinguished practitioners. King Arthur is in many ways the creation myth of this genre, a wellspring from which many have found inspiration and cheerful plagiarism. J.R.R Tolkien and C.S. Lewis are the pioneers, but in the years that followed, they have been joined by a host of others: Susan Cooper, Ursula Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, and most recently, J.K. Rowling. These

writers, beloved of children and adults, comprise an important source, and source of renewal, for the idea and vocabulary of magic. A vocabulary is a living social process, and any analysis of the meanings and dynamics represented by that vocabulary can be illuminated by an examination of the myths and stories we tell about magic.

> Myths reveal psychological and historical possibilities, as bequeathed by human evolution. Myths do not dwell on what we now call our inner life, but tell stories in which psychological traits are transfigured into concrete actions of gods and mortals. (Robert Lifton – *The Protean Self)*

What I want to focus on here is not the total scope or range of magic, but one particular, gendered aspect of it, as represented in Fantasy literature read primarily by adolescents. I am not here interested in the mechanisms of magic—whether magic comes from charms, or spells, if it is inborn or learned, or any of the other myriad cosmologies and gimmicks whereby the workings of magic are explicated. What I am interested in is the social position of the protagonist in these stories, and the changes that are effected in that position through the discovery or development of magical power. The protagonists and heroes of this body of literature are overwhelmingly outsiders, misfits, outcasts, and loners. The social figure of this genre of fiction, when it is most fully realized, is the Orphan—not an orphan in the limited sense of one whose parents have died, though this is often the case, but an orphan as one who is alienated.

The Orphan functions as a social figure because this protagonist's lack of parental care and advocacy is reproduced by society at large. Fantasy literature exhibits a great many ways of achieving the same effect without actually killing the parents off; boarding schools, uncaring or absent parents, or even large families, can produce rather the same effect as far as

attention and singularity are concerned. Well-adjusted popular children with many friends and adoring parents are not fit subjects for this type of fiction. When the typical story opens, our hero is suffering because he (the vast majority are male) is alone, oppressed, and alienated to some degree. In *The Dark Is Rising,* by Susan Cooper, Will Stanton is the youngest of nine children. There are always "too many kids in this family . . . you'd think this house was big enough, but there's always people" (Cooper, 3). Like the orphan, who is often literally alone, this kind of hierarchical sociality can lead to its own kind of isolation. No one "was likely to miss you talk in the cheerful babble of the Stanton family, especially when you were its youngest member" (Cooper, 12). This is the happy version of the pre-magical outcast; they are usually in much direr, if less realistic, straits. In C.S. Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*, Diggory is not quite an orphan, but when the book opens he is crying because he'd "lived all his life in the country and had a pony, and a river at the bottom of the garden" and then been brought to live with his Aunt and Uncle because his "father was away in India . . . and Mother was ill and was going to-going to-die" (Lewis 1955, 3). Lewis wrote seven books in his Narnia series, and since he couldn't very well keep on repeating this "mother is about to die" trope, he had to find other ways of simulating orphanhood. In *The Silver Chair* he uses that most durable of English traditions, the boarding school, where we find Jill Pole crying behind the gym because she is being bullied by the school gang. Literal orphans are equally popular, and they are always to some degree alienated by the situation, no matter how happy their lives may be otherwise. Lloyd Alexander's hero, Taran, is not only an orphan, but works as an Assistant Pig-keeper, a situation that torments him through the course of several volumes. Luke Skywalker was raised by his Aunt and Uncle as well.

The orphan is a character that is ostracized, set apart, and often friendless. They do not live in exciting places. They are profoundly defined, even self-defined, as "other." However, without exception, in the stories so far discussed they manage a transformation of this difference into *distinction* through the discovery and use of magic. Perhaps the clearest, and certainly the most popular, example of this literary figure is Harry Potter. Here we find the ultimate expression of aggrieved orphanhood, a depiction that verges on parody due to the hyperbolic nature of the abuse poor Harry receives. His parents were killed when he was only one year old, but he has no pictures or mementos of them, and is not allowed to ask questions. He was sent to live with his Aunt and Uncle who have helped accustom him to spiders "because the cupboard under the stairs was full of them, and that was where he slept" (Rowling 1997, 19). His birthday has never been celebrated, he wears only his cousins' cast-off clothing, and his glasses are "held together with scotch tape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose" (Rowling 1997, 20). He has no friends because "everyone knew that Dudley's gang hated that odd Harry Potter in his baggy old clothes and broken glasses" (Rowling 1997, 30).

Here we get to the real issue: Harry is not just disliked, he is disliked because he is "odd." His Aunt and Uncle "were proud to say that they were perfectly normal" and the "last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange and mysterious" (Rowling 1997, 1). They live on Privet Drive, a name specially picked out to signify staid, conservative, middle-class Britain. They hate Harry's asking questions, but even more they object to his "talking about anything acting in a way it shouldn't . . . they seemed to think he might get dangerous ideas" (Rowling 1997, 26). They think this because they know that Harry's mother had been a witch and his father a wizard, and so Harry no doubt is possessed of magical tendencies as

well. However, his relatives define magic according to their own standards. His Aunt believes she was "the only one who saw" her sister "for what she was—a freak" and feels sure that Harry "would be just the same, just as strange, just as – as – abnormal" (Rowling 1997, 53). It isn't until he finds out about his parents and is told about his own wizardry that he can be happy, not until he can "be with youngsters of his own sort" (Rowling 1997, 58). Magic for Harry Potter, as for most of the children's literature that explicitly addresses it, is a vehicle for redefining difference, for finding a peer group, and a place to belong.

This is a very profound, and very old, narrative—though perhaps it only comes to have critically important meaning for the children of modernity. This is not an obscure genre of literature. To the extent that isolation and loneliness are the general rather than the notable condition today, there is something extremely moving in the story of an individual discovering something unique and special that allows them to transcend their situation. When we dream of this sort of transcendence, we usually dream big. Harry is famous, successful, and a star athlete. It is not hard to see echoes of King Arthur in his story. Lack of belonging is perhaps the archetypal problem of modern industrial society, but just like Harry Potter, we can transform our isolation and weirdness if we can find a magical vehicle to redefine ourselves. Many such vehicles are available, but the one I want to focus on is identification with musical or literary artists, and the material objects (books, CDs, T-shirts, stickers, posters, etc) that provide a material basis for such.

Musical Talismans, Magical Talismans

This is a particularly appropriate area of investigation, because the adolescent males who read and appreciate the fantasy literature discussed above make up such a lion's share of those who construct an identity around musical groups. This type of individuation is not

particularly well regarded, nor is any such activity that revolves around consumer goods. It is perceived as shallow and superficial, producing an identity that is ephemeral and unable to sustain a person through moments of crisis. It is derided as blind acceptance of a destructive capitalistic system, a wide-eyed naïve acceptance of the "utopian promise of the commodity" that accepts advertising's assurances that "their product will enhance your individuality and identify you as a rebel, even while providing a passport into an imagined community" (Nguyen). This is a rather popular critique these days, and I think it is a worthwhile one. I have no desire to rebut, for instance, Mimi Nguyen, quoted above on the vileness of the "ideological guts of consumer capitalism" (Nguyen). She was writing about Unamerican Activities, a company that manufactures stickers, buttons, T-shirts, and doo-dads with pseudo-revolutionary slogans on them. If you ever want a sticker that says, "You Are All Sheep" or a T-shirt that advocating bombarding the mall, this is the place to go. See Figure 3.

Figure 3. "The mall has decimated our cultures relations of consumption."

As Nguyen points out, their ad copy goes a little beyond even the usual hyperbole associated with marketing to American teenagers:

> Simply live a life that's aware of your own potential and it's yours. Unamerican Activities is a grassroots campaign to REBOOT AMERICA. We are this nation's saving grace – a subculture that uses its freedom to make things better for everyone. (Unamerican Catalog).

I wholeheartedly support Nguyen's critique of Unamerican, they deserve a good kicking, and she gives them one. She points out, as many others have in other contexts, that "what Unamerican retails as liberation could be instead authority disguised as freedom—your desires packaged in a commodity form that affirms the existing social order" (Nguyen). However, she also suggests, but does not follow up on, something important about the origins of this type of marketing.

Instead of being a "dumbing down of radical thought," Unamerican practices "the co-opting of youth culture" (Nguyen). What this implies is that the utopian promise of the commodity exists independently of any particular mode of production and that advertisers are trying (probably successfully) to co-opt a process that goes on no matter what they do. It suggests that the relationship between material objects and identity is a powerful thing indeed. It suggests that it does not matter whether those objects are bought or found. It suggests that ultimately we cannot judge the process of consumption to be necessarily equivalent to the ideology of production, although the two are linked in many subtle and devious ways.

I do not want to justify, defend, or apologize for any particular mode of production. I do, however, want to celebrate a certain type of consumerism, because despite the many

shortcomings and pitfalls of the system that makes it possible, we can and do create a valid, meaningful self out of the things we buy. The music that we love spawns a raft of material goods, the books we read literally only exist in a material form. Our engagement with this type of culture is mediated through things, and when those things speak to us, when they are alive for us, we can use them to link the mystery and wonder of the art they represent to our own lives. I want to praise the existential creativity that enables us to make this leap, to take a Duran Duran T-shirt (for instance) and use it, magically, to invoke the very real and moving experience of a Duran Duran concert.

The way these talismans are used can be understood in light of Walter Benjamin's mimetic theory of experience, which argues that the world is covered with signs that must be deciphered. These signs, which reveal resemblances and affinities, are themselves no more than forms of similitude. To know must therefore be to interpret. The place where the individual perceives this similarity is what sociologists would call the interface between structure and agency, the moment in which a person interprets and creates the self. For Benjamin this is never a strategic project, but always a magical one. He likens the process to Proust's concept of "involuntary memory" where "the past is somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object" (Benjamin 1968, 158). For Proust the object was a small cake, called a madeline, the taste of which "transported him back into the past" (Benjamin 1968, 158).

The important distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory is in the word "transported," as opposed to "reminded," for instance. The former memories that Proust had of his past were voluntary, he could remember certain details but not the essential flavor of

the thing, not the lived, felt experience. The taste of the pastry catapulted him back and revived the sensual memory of his past. In this type of experience Benjamin found the creation of the self, where "certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past" (Benjamin 1968, 160). By invoking the involuntary memory with a material object, "voluntary and involuntary recollection lose their mutual exclusiveness" (Benjamin 1968, 160). In other words, once you have a material object that can link you to affective, experiential memories, you can use that object as a talisman to invoke them again at will. This theory guides the present investigation, a search for the objects and affects with which individuals sensually interact in the creation of the self, a process that is always in the foreground and always more than a bit magical.

Surveys and Methods (such as they are)

I have not simply relied on Proust's assurances that experience operates in this manner. Instead, I have very temporarily abandoned literary analysis and taken a more traditionally sociological route: I have conducted a survey. Potential respondents were identified through the Amazon.com website, which invites customers and casual web surfers alike to sign up and write reviews of books, CDs and whatnot. Some of these reviews, particularly the longer, more articulate ones, linked to a personal profile created by the reviewer and maintained on the website and, when I was lucky, included an e-mail address. The "questionnaire" was sent out via e-mail in two waves of forty.

The first wave was sent primarily to individuals whose reviews were particularly long, and the second wave to those with particularly recent reviews. In both cases the idea was to increase response rate; however, the first wave proved to be far more effective. The

first forty potential respondents were selected not for any particular set of opinions, but because they had a lot to say in their reviews. Given this and the fact that they had included an e-mail address in their personal profile (or as a screen name) I hoped there was a good chance that they would be willing to read and respond to a somewhat lengthy questionnaire. Of the forty surveys sent, 10 were rejected as undeliverable and 12 responses were received.

In an ultimately self-defeating attempt to increase response rate, the second wave's selections were screened by date; I selected only those who had written reviews within the last six months. Of the forty surveys sent, seven were rejected as undeliverable and seven responses were received. This left me with 19 total responses out of 63 valid e-mails sent for an overall response rate of 30%. They ranged from a high of 2100 words to a low of 143, with an average of 581.

Two obvious factors influenced this rate: the length of the survey and the nature of e-mail. The survey was rather long, just over a thousand words, and not necessarily user friendly. However, the very nature of the question dictates that useful replies come from individuals who are already interested in the subject, somewhat conversant with the nomenclature, and willing to devote some time to informing strangers about their musical or literary tastes. Amazon.com reviewers are in many ways ideal for this task. They provide an easy-to-access set of respondents who are willing and able to talk about their relationship to art and the material possessions that reproduce it.

The second obvious source of non-response is due to the very nature of e-mail. An e-mail address is not a permanent thing. Indeed, aside from the 17 invalid e-mail address, there were no doubt a number of others that, while still technically operative, are no longer

actually changed. Even accounts that are still actively employed are unlikely to produce a response if they are not checked fairly often. The proliferation of junk mail that is drawn to most easily available free e-mail accounts (Hotmail, Yahoo, etc.) is incredible. Opening such an account after even a week or so, one is unlikely to carefully scrutinize mail from strangers to see if there might be an interesting survey that they'd like to fill out. In fact, the majority of replies were received within 48 hours of sending the surveys. See Figure 4.

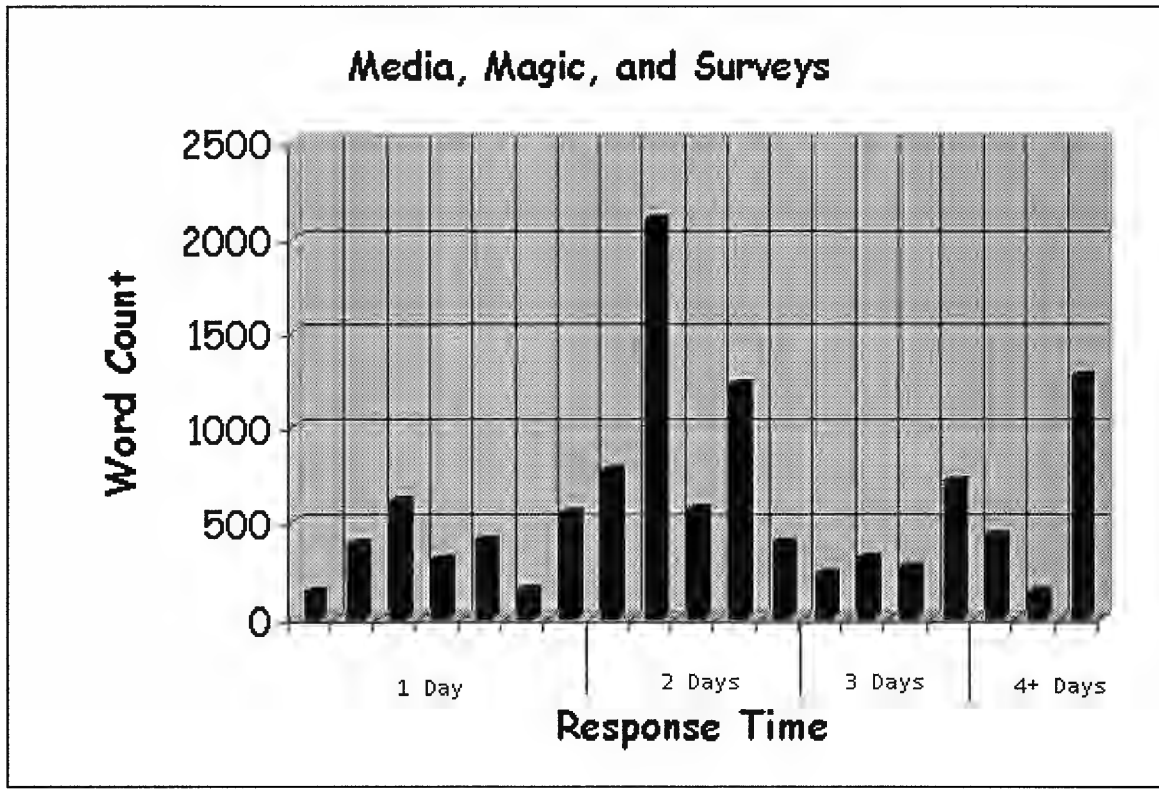

Figure 4. People often answer e-mail immediately or not at all.

This is an unavoidable source of non-response, but the low cost and ease of sending surveys counterbalance it considerably.

The Survey Proper, The Question At Hand

Hi, my name is Neil Dryden, I'm a Masters student in Sociology at Iowa State University and I'm hoping you will be willing to fill out a short survey. You were identified as a likely respondent through your Personal Profile on Amazon.com, specifically through your review of ********** If filling out an e-mail survey sounds like a bad idea just delete this e-mail and you will never be bothered again. Any information you do submit will be held strictly confidential, and will never be associated with your e-mail address or any information that would allow you to be identified.

This survey is part of a larger research effort investigating the way individuals create and maintain their identity through interactions with everyday objects, rituals and customs. Specifically I'm interested in the way we use media—CD's, books, movies, and the assorted posters, T-shirts, stickers, and merchandise that go with them—to "present" who we are to the world. This subject has received attention in the sociological literature before, but almost always it has been assumed that such behavior is *strategic*. For instance:

> Why was it so important for us to seek out the obscure bands and, even more important, to abandon them when they became "too popular"? Was it snobbery? There was undeniably a little poseur in all of us. We found things that we deemed cool and stood next to them as if to say, Though I can't really say who I am, I can say that I am the sort of person who would associate with this. I fell in love with a girl who carried a Joy Division record into my astronomy lecture. Maybe because.
> (Jim Neill—liner notes, Postpunk Chronicles: Left of the Dial. Rhino Records)

Ryan Kearney expresses similar sentiments in his recent review of the Pixies' Complete B-Sides in the Pitchfork Review:

> When I bought this album the other day, wearing my Pixies shirt by coincidence (I swear!), the shave-headed girl behind the counter said, "Nice shirt. I *love* the Pixies." I told her that I already owned all these songs, but just had to buy the album, anyway. "Oh, really," she said cautiously, as though there were something pathetic about that. "Maybe there is," I later thought to myself. But then I looked at my tattered Pixies shirt, so beaten and worn it was practically falling off my body, and I thought otherwise. Like the music itself, which remains as vital and exciting as it was upon the day of its release, I'll never let this shirt go. Some things you just keep around to remind you of your first true love. (Kearney)

My interest lies in what these accounts leave out. They both describe what it's like afterwards, keeping the old Pixies T-shirt as a memento of first love, or walking around with a record because you've decided it's cool. As a result both accounts seem somewhat guilty about the whole thing, the authors worried that they're poseurs or a little pathetic. What I'm investigating is that moment when you first fell in love with that record, when you first decided that band was cool, because those moments were certainly not strategic. These moments of falling in love (or whatever) are what Jack Katz (prominent sociologist) calls the foreground (as opposed to the background).

> Instead, to one degree or another, we are always being seduced or repelled by the world. This is fascinating (interesting, beautiful, sexy, dull, ugly, disgusting), we know (without having to say), as if the *thing itself possessed the designated quality independent of us and somehow controlled our understanding of it*. Indeed, the very nature of mundane being is emotional; attention is feeling, and consciousness is sensual.

In other words, when Ryan Kearney fell in love with the Pixies, and bought that now threadbare T-shirt, he was not just deciding that many people with whom he would like to associate also liked this band, and so a T-shirt would be a good way to start conversation. Their music, and so their merchandise, seemed to reach out and grab him *like magic*, as if the shirt or the CD possessed a power over him. So what I want to know is, do you have a

moment like that? Do you have a favorite band, author, song, book, or video that affected you in this way? If so, please answer the questions below!

1. **Who is your favorite band or author?** Feel free to describe anything from a genre of music (punk, ska, emo) to a specific song or part of a song (the first line of Little Plastic Castles by Ani DiFranco), from a genre of literature (fantasy novels, murder mysteries) to a particular scene in a book or movie (the Death Star blowing up in Star Wars, Boo Radely helping Scout in *To Kill A Mockingbird).*

2. **What was it like when you first encountered he/she/it/them? Do you still feel a tingle when you meet other people who feel the same way** (a Depeche Mode shirt, a Jeanette Winterson novel)? Everyone presents themselves to the world through things. The clothes you wear, the way you decorate your home, the music you listen to, the books you read. These things can never be neutral. If you wear a suit it says one thing, if you have pink hair and a tongue piercing it says another. However I believe that especially with the music and books and movies we enjoy there is often a good deal more to the relationship. Tell me how these things have moved you or tell me why you disagree

The "Secret We're So Cool Club"

> The most elementary hierophanies…are nothing but a radical ontological separation of some object from the surrounding cosmic zone; some tree, some stone, some place, by the mere fact that *it reveals that it is sacred,* that it has been, as it were, "chosen' as the receptacle for a manifestation of the sacred, is thereby ontologically separated from all other stones, trees, places, and occupies a different, a supernatural plane.
>
> Mircea Eliade – *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of Ecstasy*

I believe that an identifiable narrative arc within the Fantasy stories discussed above corresponds to an arc of experience that *can* be found within the experience of contemporary music fans. That is to say that some experience of loneliness (no matter how relative), isolation or anomie can be overcome through the transcendent experience of music (literature, movies, etc.) and so forge a sense of community through the display and observation of the material objects that are the vehicles of the music. Like all narratives, this one is fictional. It is a narrative that children's authors have constructed over and over again, it is a narrative that I have constructed out of a stack of survey responses, and it is, I hope, a

narrative that many have constructed out of their own lives. However, there is one important caveat; J.K. Rowling is telling the story from the point of view of Harry Potter. That is to say that magic is presented as un-problematically and universally transcendent and efficacious. This is also how almost any representation of the sacred is presented. However, for those who find their transcendence in a compact disc, or a T-shirt, or a poster, it is obvious that the magical experience is more personal and subjective.

"These Stories Make Me Feel Alive!"

> What's weird in retrospect is how I seemed to have willed the circumstances into being, how much I seemed to know before I knew anything at all. There shouldn't have been anything at stake for me, seeing *The Searchers* that first time. Yet there was. Going to a Film Society screening was ordinarily a social act, but I made sure to go alone that night. I smoked a joint alone too, my usual preparation for a Significant Moment. And I choose my heavy black-rimmed glasses, the ones I wore when I wanted to appear nerdishly remote and intense, as though to decorate my outer self with a confession of inner reality. The evening of that first viewing of *The Searchers* I readied myself like a man who suspects his first date might become an elopement.
>
> Jonathan Lethem – "Defending the Searchers"

Respondents reacted to every part of my questionnaire, but it was the descriptions of "first encounters" that elicited the longest and most vivid descriptions. The one theme touched upon by all the respondents is the *sincerity* of their appreciation and the *authenticity* of the media they are drawn to. One reported that "when I listen to 'Secrets of the Beehive' by David Sylvian, my body alters." Like Proust with his madeline, the respondent remembers falling "in love for the first time at the age of 22 drinking chamomile and listening to this haunting record." I was struck again and again by the passionate accounts of a first encounter with an author or artist who became important for the respondent. Animism, my first defining characteristic of magic, runs through a number of these accounts.

> The music is talking to me and it describes who I am, how I act, how I think. I relate to the music. It's my security blanket. I know it will make me feel good. It's like living in a strange place and finally coming home. I'm in my own time, in my own world when I listen to this music. It's going home to someone's heart and cuddling up and falling asleep while the rain outside falls and you are happy with the thought that the rain won't touch you. It's being inside the womb of your mother when you feel there is nowhere else to turn. (Anonymous survey respondent "A")

These are accounts that locate us in the foreground of emotional experience, and remind me again that when *things* are alive and speak to us we do not and can not respond strategically. The respondent quoted above has an exceptionally intense memory of what it feels like when "the music is talking to me" and as the string of metaphors describe the sense of absorption and insularity they make it clear that this type of experience cannot be directly described, only invoked in the listener. This is the great danger in trying to write about magic, the reductive power of words and analysis may lessen the very real, intimate, sensual encounter that compels us to believe, and creates a slightly different person than existed before. Many respondents also indicated, explicitly or implicitly, that this was a bodily experience. One, describing his reaction to the work of J.R.R. Tolkien wrote:

> Again, as with the music, it represents a kind of aesthetic ethos that is so identifiable and compelling that it sends shivers down my spine. It awakens in me a sense of what C.S. Lewis referred to as Joy, a kind of excitement and longing at the same time, as if the beauty we now perceive is only a faint shadow of our true Home. (Anonymous Survey Respondent "B")

Those "shivers down my spine" are not simply a pleasant belletristic conceit; these encounters are effervescent, with all the frothy, under-your-skin connotations that word can produce. Whether we think of them as products of art or commerce, everyone comes into contact with these books and CDs every day. The vast majority of the time the CD is just that, a piece of plastic. We handle them idly, always somewhat aware of their immense potential to transform our self-conception, but never exactly able to force that process beyond

the gentle nudge that can come from preparation, when we, like Jonathan Lethem, have some intimation of what is to come. However, it is important to remember that "we do not usually experience things, nor are affects produced, in the rational and objective ways our terms tend to portray them" (Gordon, 22). I have tried to apply the vocabulary of magic to the way identity is created out of the consumption of books, music, and other media because I wanted to highlight the way they alter and transform us, shape the way we see ourselves, not just the way others see us. Many of the choices we make about material things are strategic, many are designed to maximize utility and minimize loss, and many are made out of a clear-headed desire to put on the right mask for the right task. On the other hand, those events that shape identity go beyond this easily explained rational process, even though they often run in tandem with it. Every single person who responded to my e-mail survey wanted to stress the passion they have felt when they encountered their favorite band or author. They have described in open-ended, poetic fashion the affective modalities of knowing themselves and the world, the way "when I first heard the Swans . . . the music grew on me" and "it expressed things inside me that I didn't know how to express before then." No one wrote to say that they only buy the vinyl singles of Will Oldham's various bands because it's a good way to strike up conversation with the other pretentious indie rock kids who hang out at the head shop downtown. No one wrote to say that they only read the graphic novels of Daniel Clowes because they were a good way to break the ice with girls who like sensitive men. No one wrote to say they only like their favorite artists for strategic reasons, not because we don't act strategically, but because strategic acts have no real effect on who we are.

One respondent began her reply by admitting "it is difficult to extricate myself, as an individual, from the things I own . . . who am I apart from this music? these books? this

poster on the wall?" She ended her narrative, however, with a favorite lyric from the punk band Fugazi: "You are not what you own." This seeming paradox reinforces what has already been said about magical encounters with music and bands. The experience itself is not produced by buying something, even when a purchase may be a necessary condition of the experience.

"Souls Pulled To the Same Magnet"

There is no acceptable blanket term for the type of person I want to talk about, and this is an important clue in understanding the sociological implications of a serious engagement with music (or any media). It is certainly not enough to say they are all music fans—many people are music fans without the critical identity-producing investment. One respondent states, "I am a self-described music fanatic, but not in the usual sense." This gets much closer to the essence of the problem, even if it isn't exactly analytically precise. Instead, the classification is based on the object of their affection. As one respondent remembers, "at 14 when I was a '*Durannie*' I lined the brim of my fedora hat with Duran Duran pins." The indie rock kids, the goths, deadheads, and the punks are all well known and easily identifiable examples of serious fans whose focus is encoded in their appellative. We do well to remember, of course, that while members of these groups constitute the most visible example of this phenomenon, their example is slightly deceptive. The majority of fans, no matter how important an artist or genre may be to them, are unwilling to adopt this type of totalizing identity. Yes, I like Fugazi, they say, but I am other thing as well.

> For example, I am aware that as a feminist, as a supporter of indie music, that I am 'supposed' to like the music of, say, Ani DiFranco. But I don't. While I respect the intentions of the artist, a personal connection or fulfillment is not made with her music and though I hear many refrains of 'You don't like Ani DiFranco?!' it doesn't change my mind. I guess this comes with age. Part of maturing involves trying to fit

> in, even if it means fitting in with the crowd that doesn't fit in. Even when conforming to non-conformity there can be no deviations! I remember for years wanting to hide my affinity for Journey, for Steve Perry. A feminist punk rocker doesn't like Journey! But even that has passed by the wayside and now I list the merits of Journey to anyone who will listen! I meet many people who, to paraphrase T.S. Eliot, 'prepare a mask to meet the masks' that they meet in everyday life. There are many music fans like this. (Anonymous Survey respondent C)

Despite this useful and well-intentioned caveat, identifying with an artist often means the creation and participation in a group identity as well as an individual one. Not only do people bond over shared interests, but especially so when those interests are rare or intense. Two different respondents used the term "exciting" to describe what it's like "on the rare occasion I find someone who shares one of my tastes." When a sense of community is created out of interests that are not only shared, but also obscure, it is a bonding based on opposition as much as similarity. We are alike, we love the same band, and we are better than those sheep who only listen to top 40 radio and watch MTV. It is a definition that helps to redefine social position, which is important for those whose social position is that of the outsider.

"Outsiders"

Many, myself included, would bristle at being labeled as lonely or isolated, but this is a key element of the story at hand. It is important to note that this "loneliness" is a general rather than an exceptional condition, and it is a tendency that is perhaps most strongly felt in adolescents and young people who have not yet anchored themselves to careers, families, and other identity-producing institutions. Harry Potter is literally without friends or even friendly acquaintances, shunned for his "weirdness," and rendered utterly alone. In real life this situation would producing schizophrenia, but it functions as a poetic exaggeration of the way many people feel, at least occasionally. To frame the situation in a more positive light,

neither community nor a sense of belonging are inherently given for most people, and they must be created out of the social world. As one respondent put it, "it's a matter of relation to the world . . . people want a sense of belonging." Ironically, to feel that you are outside the norm, that you are weird, has become rather the normal experience.

Like magic, music can serve incipient fans as a vehicle for redefining their isolation, their loneliness, their lack of community. It can turn particularity from a negative to a positive. A common first step in this process is becoming attached to the obscure, the avant-garde, and the unknown. A widespread, but certainly not universal, feature of the *serious* music fan is exclusivity. As Jim Neill noted above, it is crucial that the bands and authors we love not be too popular. Many respondents stressed that they did not care for "mainstream" music. It was common to hear a dislike for "what the general population enjoys." People who have much personal identity staked in their musical preferences "don't like to be a follower . . . don't like to have all the new clothes or CD's everyone has . . . like to be different." Most individual accounts emphasize that obscurity does not inherently drive their musical likes and dislikes. One respondent, a Cocteau Twins fan, argued that it was in fact the other way around, that particularly for those who spend a good deal of time listening to music it is natural for individual tastes to be varied and divergent.

> I don't think there's a component in my taste that draws me to things just *because* they're obscure—I could get a lot *more* obscure if I wanted to! I tend to think that there are qualities inherent in the aesthetics themselves that sets them apart from the Lowest Common Denominator as a matter of course. I just like what I like. Here's my take on the sociology of music: music that's mass-marketed is specifically designed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, which necessarily means "watering down" things that would make them unique or exciting to a certain slice of the population (i.e., me). It's this watering-down which makes most mainstream music completely boring and bland to me. I wouldn't abandon a certain band *just because* they became "popular," although if they became "popular," it would probably mean that

> they've watered down the elements in them that drew me to them in the first place, in which case I'd be much less interested in them at that point. (Anonymous survey respondent "D")

I find this argument fairly compelling. To believe that music fans are constantly monitoring their favorite band's level of popularity, ready to adjust their tastes at a moment's notice, suggests that any actual encounter with the music is a sham. In her analysis of animism, Nurit Bird-David insisted that we "personify" things "as, when, and because we socialize with them," that is to say we animate things because we feel affected by them, not the other way around (Bird-David, 78). Likewise, I believe that the vast majority of music fans become attached to a given band because that band moves them, and it would be near impossible to sustain long-term interest in a group for purely strategic reasons. That said, anyone who spends time around or within a musically oriented sub-culture cannot help but notice a certain reaction to the fashionableness of their favorites. One respondent recalled a friend who "was really into REM in high school, but became more and more not into them as . . . more of the 'normal' folks in high school learned of them" a common reaction for fans of early REM. However, this is really the exception that proves the rule. Even if there is some level of pretentiousness, or even if some of those serious music fans really are poseurs who abandon a band simply because it becomes mainstream, this still suggests the primacy of emotional engagement. Nobody argues that those REM fans only *claimed* to appreciate the music because they wanted to appropriate the trendy unconventional reputation the group had in their early days. The most that is claimed is that enjoyment of the group was lessened by hearing everybody in high school singing along to "Stand" on the jukebox in Pizza Hut. Especially for those who already feel like they do not belong to the mainstream in general, music that is appreciated by the mainstream is unlikely to appeal. However, the evidence at

hand suggests that the opposite is not true, that they will not appreciate obscure music simply because it is unknown.

Several respondents comment on the relationship between feeling "different" and liking music that was "different" and unusual.

> I think part of the feeling is the need to be different than others, a natural feeling for Jewish people. A*** grew up in rural ***** with a strong Jewish identity and I grew up here in the buckle of the Bible Belt so both of us I think naturally felt like outsiders (also being geeky smart types). So from all sides, we felt like outsiders. *Being into bands and also literature that no one had ever heard of helped us I think be OK in being outsiders*, and on a weird level to reinforce in ourselves the importance of being outsiders, because everyone else was such losers. (my emphasis)

Like Harry Potter, the goal is not to join the "normal" people who are thoroughly unpleasant anyway, the goal is to find a way to redefine the difference, to reverse the direction of exclusion. Sociologically speaking, in the presence genuine aesthetic pleasure, engagement with obscure or niche bands, authors, movies, and other media allow a radical reinterpretation of the social order. What I have called "magic" is the critical element in understanding this process. It is not enough to simply decide you wish to redefine yourself from "geek" to "cool." For this project to succeed, even partially or provisionally, it must work through the ontology-transforming magic that is available to those who are affected by the music, and this affect works through objects.

As one respondent noted, "it's a basic human trait to want to be around people with the same tastes as you" and "of course, the more obscure these tastes are, the more exciting it becomes when someone else is into it. Definite '*secret we're so cool club*' effect going on" (my emphasis). This autobiographical observation, perhaps offered up somewhat self-deprecatingly, encapsulates the entire story I've tried to tell so far. It is *secret* because the members are defining themselves not just as united together, but united *against,* the

"mainstream," which is the villain of this particular tale. Sometimes, as in the Harry Potter stories, the mainstream has a particular representative, but just as often it is represented by proxy through all the "bad" music out there. In other words, it isn't necessary to actually know the people who like Celine Dion in order to help define yourself as part of a group that rejects Celine Dion. It is *cool,* because it represents a passion for something. You can't really be in the club unless you really are passionate about the object of your interest. When asked what Fugazi's lyrics meant to her, one respondent remembered that she and her husband "fell in love to 'Margin Walker' . . . my husband, a serious Fugazi fan when I met him, and I, a new convert to Fugazi, bonded in a very deep way over the music of that band." This is not possible unless you are truly engrossed by the object at hand. Finally, it is a *club* because it involves creating elements of both individual and group identity. Magic is difference.

"Any Time You Put Their Record on the Turntable"

The goal of this examination is twofold; first to demonstrate through particular examples how magic is constructed and second to further establish the qualitative differences between magical and mundane experiences. So far, I have mainly done this in the present tense; however, it is a endlessly reproducible phenomena, precisely because it is one rooted in material things. This brings us back to Benjamin's assertion that voluntary memory and involuntary memory can lose their "mutual exclusiveness" through "the rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals" that are inspired by "experience in the strict sense of the world" (Benjamin 1968, 160). An affection for musical talismans can serve the same purpose, uniting the voluntary memory of facts (when did you see the concert, what seat were you in,

what was the set list) with the involuntary memory of experience (how did the music make you feel) and at the same time can help to further explicate the nature of magic.

Here we can valuably return to Ryan Kearney, the reviewer who bought the new Pixies anthology, though he already owned all the songs in their original incarnations. Like many manifestations of magic, this one becomes apparent because other explanations are obviously inadequate. There is no utility in the purchase, just as there is no utility left in the "tattered Pixies shirt, so beaten and worn it was practically falling off my body." The rational actor paradigm obviously does not fit the circumstances. Instead, we have to ask, what function does that T-shirt, or that new, useless, CD serve Ryan Kearney? One respondent argues musical talismans are the only way we have to express our connection with the higher power we sense in our aesthetic appreciation of the art they represent. Like "the Shroud of Turin, the Holy Grail, the Lost Ark of the Jewish Temple" they help us, because in "connecting with the physical objects...will somehow reinforce their connectedness to this higher power." Without strictly defining it as such, most survey respondents reject a portrayal of their purchases as simply conspicuous consumption. If we reject the notion that material goods serve purely (or exclusively) utilitarian or display purposes we have to ask what role these possessions do play, and I believe one obvious role is to act as a catalyst in the reaction described by Benjamin and Proust.

Several respondents go into greater detail as to the nature of this transaction, the narrative strip that actually realizes the goal that Benjamin describes, and in doing so presents a new model for the magical experience in the feedback loop.

> I do however have a favorite type of music and that is Hi-NRG (a.k.a. disco,dance,electronic,europop,ect). My attraction to this type of music goes back to when I realized my sexuality. Being gay made be different right away and the teasing

> was not far behind. So I found safety in music, but I found strength in Dance music. The soaring vocals, the pounding of the beat, driving endlessly into a frenzy. This frenzy could be sexual or empowering. My mind was stimulated and happiness soon followed. No matter what my mood, the music always put me in a 'happy place'. Not all music would only Dance music would. (Anonymous Survey Respondent E)

So far this closely follows the paradigmatic narrative I've discussed; the outsider who transcends and redefines their categorization through an intense aesthetic involvement with, in this case, dance music. However, this particular account goes on to give further clues about the mechanism for deploying this kind of magic beyond the initial experience. For the respondent dance music brought on "a feeling that is so strong that it's unbreakable" that "can be invoked at will by playing a certain cd." In other words our relationships with these possessions can be both affective and responsive. They can serve as the carriers of a transcendent experience that allow their bearer to rebuild the original moment, in essence, to construct a situation that carries you away.

Another respondent repeats these themes, with a twist:

> There was something in the music to personally identify with; I don't know how to describe it any better than to say that listening to that music made you feel that there was someone or something that understood you - you had a friend in the world that might not live in your hometown, but who would come to you *any time you put their record on the turntable*. You were never alone because of the music. It was a constant buffer against the cruelties of the world, and a buoy in times of distress and a supplicant in times of joy. (my emphasis) (Anonymous Survey Respondent F)

Where the former account describes the process as an invocation, the second suggests something more like animism. The music, as represented in the physical object that is the album, is a person that you can talk to and that can talk to you. It suggests that the extreme disparity between the effort and the effect of listening to music in these circumstances leads to the vocabulary of magic. That very simple physical actions, pushing a play button or

placing a record on a turntable, can produce such powerful feelings and emotions is the sign that a magical transaction has taken place. Magic is then like a feedback loop, where the process is obviously self-initiated, but whose results seem all out of proportion with the visible effort. This is finally just another way to understand the paradox that always accompanies the presence of magic, or the sacred, that it is always "something we artfully produce and yet experience as forces that take us over independently of our will" (Katz 1999, 7).

If the magical experience is qualitatively different from other mundane experiences, then it also must be that magic is not defined by a level of intensity. For instance, if intense emotions are engendered by the achievement of a life goal, long pursued through hard and diligent work, this is not magical, no matter how intense those feelings are. Likewise, magic is easiest to see and articulate in the rather exceptional circumstances such as those detailed above, but it must also exist in milder versions. Both these accounts relate literal reenactment of the original experience, in the replaying of the music. However, this is not to say that other kinds of magical talismans cannot have the same effect. One respondent describes a attachment to a relatively unknown band that has grown in stature since he started following them, and reports "I've got two of their original design shirts which have since gone out of print that give me a strange feeling of importance whenever I wear them." This suggests perhaps that the reaction to the lesser icons of allegiance, the posters, stickers, T-shirts, and patches goes beyond mere clique-ishness. These symbols of our aesthetic experience can create bonds precisely because they re-ignite the passion present in the original experience. They function as tiny chunks of encapsulating materiality that can provide the basis for a affective, sensual memory which in turn provides the hidden basis for

a great deal of behavior. As another respondent put it, "I go bonkers when I catch a glimpse of someone who has something I like, or actually, more specifically, something I find passionate…"

What Does Le Tigre Say About Social Theory

hot topic is the way that we rhyme
hot topic is the way that we rhyme
one step behind the drum style
one step behind the drum style
Carol Rama and Eleanor Antin
Yoko Ono and Carolee Schneeman
You're getting old, that's what they'll say, but
Don't give a damn I'm listening anyway
Gertrude Stein, Marlon Riggs, Billie Jean King, Ut, DJ Cuttin Candy, David Wojnarowicz, Melissa York, Nina Simone, Ann Peebles, Tammy Hart, The Slits, Hanin Elias, Hazel Dickens, Cathy Sissler, Shirley Muldowney, Urvashi Vaid, Valie Export, Cathy Opie, James Baldwin, Diane Dimassa, Aretha Franklin, Joan Jett, Mia X, Krystal Wakem, Kara Walker, Justin Bond, Bridget Irish, Juliana Lueking, Cecilia Dougherty, Ariel Skrag, The Need, Vaginal Creme Davis, Alice Gerard, Billy Tipton, Julie Doucet, Yayoi Kusama, Eileen Myles
Oh no no no don't stop stop.....

.

The above song lyrics come from a band named Le Tigre, formed by Kathleen Hanna after the dissolution of Bikini Kill, the prototypical "riot grrrl" punk rock band. Unlike her previous outfit, Le Tigre makes dance influenced electronic music, that is to say music created through the use of samplers and drum machines, with live instruments playing a secondary role. Hanna has always made a political agenda an integral part of her music, and the song quoted above is an obvious continuation of this. "Hot Topic" has begun to assume the status of a modern day anthem, a minor icon of the young, feminist, computer literate generation. The band in general, but this song in particular, has begun to serve the same function as the musical talismans discussed above for a great many people. However while the general thrust of the song may be obvious enough, the specific intent is sufficiently cryptic to warrant an entry in the band's FAQ on their label's website.

We wanted to make a song that was about community and history. Notions like "community" can seem so totalizing and problematic that we retreat to irony or oppositional self-definitions, and we wanted to say fuck that. Instead let's be sincere and take risks and

just talk about who we are and who gives us strength as feminists and as artists. The idea of making a list song with the names of artists and thinkers that are really important to us was daunting because we knew it would be impossible to include everyone, and of course not all of us would agree on each name. The song is partial, unfinished, a snapshot of recurring conversations, books on our nightstands, records on our turntables. We didn't want to be elitist or obscure, we wanted to get the word out about stuff that not everyone knows about, i.e. "I fucking love Yoko Ono and Angela Davis, maybe I should look up Carolee Schneeman and Mab Segrest next time I'm at the library." And even though Hot Topic is recorded now and exists in a finished form, we hoped that it would be understood as having an open structure for other voices to shout out their own list of names. (Le Tigre)

This is obviously an eminently sociological project, the creation of community, strategies to overcome oppositional self-definition, and the creation of an open-ended discourse as opposed to a reified social artifact all sound like very familiar ideas, ideas that are important to contemporary, even cutting-edge, Sociology. However, because of the tone and style restrictions within academic publishing Sociology threatens to make itself irrelevant to these very issues. Research and publication will simply become the place markers of status within an insular and untouchable community. Standard sociological method would rule out (have ruled out) Kathleen Hanna and her project for serious consideration as either the subject or the object of sociological inquiry, and I think this may be our loss not hers. Academic writers can't seriously engage in her work, and she would never be able to function in an academic environment as it stands. Sociology, when it expresses distance from the subject matter and strives to be professional and serious forfeits the ability to write affectively. This is a sociology that has fundamentally turned towards demographics and background issues, those features of social life that can be quantified, and away from the foreground, social life as it is actually experienced. More to the point, this is not new, controversial, or secret. Hillary Chute, in the Village Voice review of the first Le Tigre album, argued that the new direction Hanna had taken with her music should not be

understood in terms of an evolution or maturing process because "Kathleen should be understood in terms of an ever-proliferating always-was-there…jouissance" (Chute, 13). She then went on to apologize; "it makes me cringe to sound so grad school in an article about a woman who – seemingly contrary to the activity of much of academia – has, crucially, been voicing her personal and political concerns in a manner accessible to prepubescent" (Chute, 13).

To some this may sound like setting the bar too low, but I believe that a discipline that seeks to explain the behavior of a group without succeeding in communicating their theories and conclusions to that group is a sham. Sociology and related disciplines purport to understand, and even bemoan, the commodification of the social environment, especially the effect this has on young people. Cultural theorists like Henry Giroux in *Stealing Innocence* predict dire consequences to come from the growing dominance of the market as a means of expression. Giroux does have some suggestions for dealing with this situation, some very predictable, and one very telling. First he makes the usual neo-utopian suggestions of the left, to flood public schools with money and resources and to completely restructure our economic system. In these situations left-leaning thinkers are inclined to argue that while their proposed solutions may seem far-fetched (the total overthrow of global capitalism) they must be put forth because we have to work for solutions no matter how far off or unlikely. Has anything this drastic ever changed because some philosopher/thinker/sociologist said so? And was it a good thing if it did? By insisting on the necessity of abrupt systematic change such theorists are actually refusing to confront the actual situation and the ways it will inevitably change. This is a problem brought into even starker relief by Giroux's second, less familiar, suggestion, that adults and parents put more effort into communicating with

their children and discover why they like such disturbing pieces of popular culture. This advice, no matter how admirable, is an admission of ignorance; academics don't understand what drives the primarily younger consumers who are building the tools of self-expression through the market. There is no fundamental understanding of what it means to experience mass-produced culture in this way. Sociology has no well-developed theory to explain what objects and possessions mean to people, what pleasures and torments can and are derived from them. It is an article of faith within this strain of social theory that the capitalist system lacked respect for personal dignity and humanity. Value has become analogous to price, and the man who knows the price of everything knows the value of nothing, and so on. This leaves little allowance for the human element, for emotion and passion that cannot be reduced to a hedonistic calculus. "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned" but social theory has seemingly forgotten the next few lines of this famous piece of Marx, which entreat us to "face with sober senses...real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind." (Marx, 6). I do not believe that the sacred and the magical disappeared from everyday life with the advent of capitalism; they are there in the rich textured fabric of individual relations with commodities and possessions, in the relations of consumption not production. Instead of bemoaning the death of magic, we must ask what does it look like under these conditions? How is it enacted and embodied?

I believe that any solution, or attempt at a solution, to the very real problems created by the market and the commodification of expression must lie through the nature of that experience, and not by simply wishing it away. The starting point for any positive social change must be located within the range of actual practice, we must challenge the primacy of the market in defining our social world through the current experience of that market. In this

regard musical subcultures can be particularly rewarding, for they offer an obvious and easily accessible conceptual framework for just this sort of attempt, and that framework is the DIY ethic. DIY ("do it yourself") is a concept first widely articulated by the punk movement of the late 70's, but which has since spread to encompass widely disparate genres and groups. Kathleen Hanna's shift from guitar based punk rock to electronic based dance music is significant because of the inherently DIY nature of the medium. Marcus Gray, in his biography of the Clash, reprinted an interview with Mick Jones, where the former lead guitarist for the band argued that hip-hop and other electronic based music resemble punk in their methodologies. "It's like punk in a way...You don't need much, just a sampler and some records. It's that whole *Sniffin' Glue* thing. Get into the basement and form a band" (Gray, 480). See Figure 5.

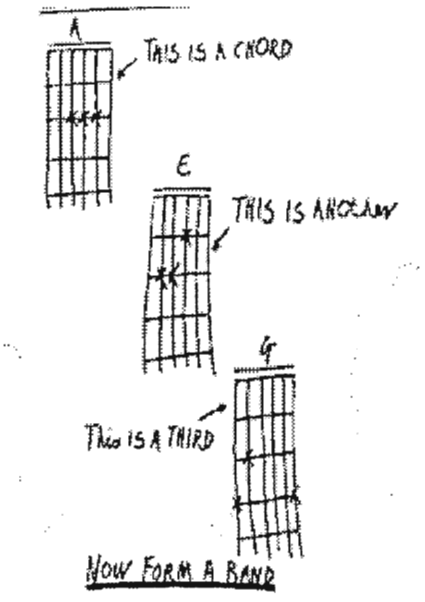

Figure 5. Classic illustration from an early fanzine devoted to the Damned.

This idea, that anyone can, and should, form a band, or more widely, try to express themselves, is perhaps the most widely influential idea in popular music today. The idea that ideas and energy can and should carry the day over mere technical competence has inspired everything from roots music revivals to low-fi bedroom 4-track experiments.

The liner notes to the most recent Le Tigre release read "in seeking specific technical information, we discover that behind the hysteria of male expertise lies the magic world of our unmade art." This manifesto refers mainly to the bands own struggles to realize their ideas through technology, from which they have been "intentionally alienated from our whole lives (as girls)" (Le Tigre). Hanna and her band mates have made learning more about this technology one of their goals because, at least in part, this is the way to further a DIY inspired ideology and make it more gender inclusive. When they dipped into their record collections to find samples to create their own songs Le Tigre were demonstrating a DIY methodology. They were taking their own creative ideas and realizing them with bits and pieces of mass-produced consumer products. They were essentially declaring the creative independence of their relationship with their things. This is the promise that DIY has always held out, but for the most part we still only acknowledge its application by musicians, although technology may be changing the definition of that role. I believe that this ethic is practiced, or can be practiced, by anyone with a relationship to a thing. In the most obvious sense by writing reviews for a website (or even answering a survey) consumers declare and create their own unique and privileged relationship with a *thing*. An affection for Eugene Ionesco lead one survey respondent to "put his picture on my computer's desktop." A friend of his "made a T-shirt with his picture and a quote of his on it." Another respondent reported when he couldn't find a T-shirt for "a cartoon character I have a real feeling for...I drew my

own." Fundamentally, I believe that consumers are capable of redefining and particularizing their possessions.

In essence, I want to claim the creative status of the artist for the consumer as well. Indeed, new recording technologies, the mechanical means of producing and reproducing art, make the difference sham. "The clunking dance beat" of the new Le Tigre single "retains such a building block quality you get the idea" they "made it up with a sample kit one of them bought on sale at Radio Shack...you get the idea that anyone could do this" (Marcus, 92). In creating their music, the members of Le Tigre have also created, or continued to create, an identity. In listening to that music, consuming that music, the devoted, passionate fan recreates it through the magical power of that relationship, and the recycled nature of electronic music has finally made clear the fundamental parallels between these two different mechanisms for creating an identity. *"Certain contents of the individual past combine with the material of the collective past"* when a musician takes old records and samples from them to make a new record, but also when a fan takes that new record and makes it their own. As regards identity I do not believe there is any fundamental difference between the two. We all go through life looking for a sword to pull from a stone.

THE SACRED IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE

> Pisces: (February 19 – March 20) "Your fascination with the Vietnam War, combined with your love of romance novels and vampire myths, cause you to produce the worst work of fiction ever." My Horoscope for this week, from The Onion, May 21, 2001.

The diverse qualitative materials I have employed in this survey have necessarily relied on inductive analysis, with each new case providing positive and negative details in constructing a sociological definition of magic. These cases are obviously not randomly selected. However, if I had any conviction when I began, it was that any question within the social sciences could be greatly illuminated through the judicious application of animism and sympathetic magic. As such, I did not seek out cases that seemed worth investigating, but took whatever came my way and assumed that it could be explicated in a way that would shed insight into the magical nature of social reality. Serendipity was my only real sampling tool. I have not tried to deal in laws or summary forms of evidence, but in tendencies and trends.

I dwell on this here, because the nature of my method is deeply tied up in the nature of the explanation I can offer, and the nature of the explanation that can be offered by a more traditional sociological method. In essence, I can only provide questions, or perhaps a different way of asking questions. If I have tried to bring to light an invisible epistemology that runs all through daily life, it is because the current epistemological rules governing sociological investigation have hidden it. In effect, the institutional rules governing evidentiary validity (and the historical situation that produced those institutions) have confounded the difference between the logic of measurement and the logic of sampling. Both procedures are designed to bridge the gap between abstract constructs and concrete

indicators. Sampling is supposed to produce "a concrete collection of cases that accurately represent unseen and abstract populations" and so, like measurement, must mediate between "what is observed and what is discussed" (Neuman, 320). However, I find the distinction between what can be rationalized and what remains irrational, or subjective, highly problematic. What do social researchers or statisticians do when reliability, accuracy, specificity, and describability cannot be applied? To me this is the story of representation in all its forms in western thought. Art, science, and literature can all hone techniques, so as to refine the precision of their measurement, but the logic of the constructs those measurements are applied to remain, in many ways, non-rational. K.C. Cole, a columnist for the Los Angeles Times, wrote this for the online magazine Slate recently:

> Speaking of numbers, today some papers made a big to-do about the 100th space walk. That's exciting, but why not celebrate the 93rd? It's funny how on the one hand, we think of numbers as abstract, objective concepts--dry statistics. But on the other hand, we react to them emotionally. The number zero was considered so horrific it was outright banned in the Western world when it was first introduced. People murdered over the irrational numbers (if you believe the stories). The world was in an uproar over whether the millennium began at the stroke midnight 1999 or 2000. Who cares? We do, for some reason. There's a lovely little book by Richard Friedberg, *An Adventurer's Guide to Number Theory*, in which he describes the number seven as "dark and full of liquid, like oil when it oozes from the ground" and two as "solid and tingly like the Bell." He compares number theory to poetry, saying it "has rules, but it also has taste" (Cole).

The most obvious example, within the social sciences, is the number 95. Certainly a 95% confidence interval is not a rule cast in stone. However, it is undeniable that 95, or its mirror image 05, possesses a degree of magic for the social science researcher. It is a standard that cannot be absolutely justified but remains an integral part in the decision making process because there is no way to establish an absolute standard. We can measure our constructs more and more exactly using statistical tools, but the way we interpret those numbers is part

of a different process. Ultimately, this is about the balance between the structure we make of the world we experience and the chaos it offers in return. That structure can be measured and produced to near endless levels of accuracy and precision, but our judgements about what those measurements mean will always have to balance between chaos and order.

Fundamentally, this need to create structure, and then to defend it, is a magical project. For Mircea Eliade man's "desire to live in the sacred is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality" (Eliade 1987, 28). The same desire that causes temples to be built, causes favorite T-shirts to be sanctified, and causes sociologists to advocate value-neutral objective science. It is the desire to create a coherent narrative out of the necessarily inchoate jumble of experience, the desire to animate our social world. We animate, that is we bring to life, objects and rituals and words at the intersection of personal and collective memory, where an experience creates a relationship between an individual and some other social actor. We objectify this relationship with the vocabulary of magic, which has been richly developed over the course of history to help express precisely these kinds of situations. Only an unfortunate historical situation surrounding the production of knowledge within the social sciences has made this conceptual language and it's use in the social world quasi-invisible.

It is practically an article of faith that the western world has become disenchanted. For the classical sociologists this was a good thing, a triumph of reason over superstition, for a more contemporary theorist it may represent a spiritual failing of western culture, but either way it is bound up in concepts of progress and the "primitive" mind. These newer thinkers see themselves as champions of indigenous peoples, supporters of ancient cultures, and critics of industrial society. The odiousness of the error so many writers committed in their

treatment of "primitive peoples" should serve as a warning to the contemporary social scientist of the dangers in holding essentially the same position, with a different emphasis on value. To assume that in an earlier time people were children and in today's world they are robots is neither a service to those groups or a particularly subtle piece of analysis. At the heart of my engagement with magic in the modern world is the belief that while the structure of society may give the experience different implications and possibilities, our fundamental ability to experience magical or sacred worlds is undiminished.

Obviously four cases studies is not enough to establish any overarching framework for a theory of magic. However, I do believe they have demonstrated the vitality and presence of magic in our supposedly disenchanted social world. This conclusion suggests the next question: What is unique about the experience of magic in a consumer society? How is it experience differently than before? What are the consequences of protean transcendence? What does it mean to experience a magical transformation when you are intensely aware that it will be transitory and fleeting in nature? Again, all conclusions must be considered extremely provisional, not only is this study in an entirely embryonic form, but the nature of the data that can be gathered today is much richer than that which survives from earlier ages. Where are the interviews with journeymen priests from the middle ages? What was the nature of the sacred for a 15th century French peasant? However, these caveats aside, what is most striking in comparing the accounts of magical experience collected here with the literature on the experience of the sacred is the bittersweet and transitory character of the magical experience.

Mircea Eliade contrasts the sacred and the profane as "two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history" (Eliade, 14).

"For the modern consciousness," that is to say the profane, modern individual, "a physiological act...is in sum only an organic phenomena" while "for the primitive such an act is never simply physiological...it is, or can become, a sacrament, that is, a communion with the sacred" (Eliade, 14). I remain wildly uncomfortable with this historical separation of the sacred and profane, and the corresponding judgments about the mind of primitive man, "that luckless dustbin of pseudo-scientific fantasies" (Barfield, 74). I have tried to show some of the techniques for the construction of the magical experience, as Eliade did for "sacred space" and I do not believe there is a fundamental difference in the basic nature of the experience. The holy is a primary state, and "all the products of 'mythological apperception' or 'fantasy' are nothing but different modes in which it has been objectified" (Otto, 15). However, the consequences of social structure, of capitalism and a consumer economy, still make themselves felt in the implications of the magical experience. We may still wish to live in the objective world, but unlike the shaman and priests that Eliade details, the modern magician must worry about affection and pretension. Sacred and profane objects, places, and rituals can now trade positions at a dizzying rate. Things reveal themselves as sacred in flits and flashes, never guaranteeing continuity of identity and always demanding another effort. Even those things that are most sacred to us at any given moment have the potential to reveal themselves as profane in an instant. Ryan Kearney has to worry about feeling pathetic when he purchases a CD, Rick Bass knows that while his dog may be capable of "*holding time in place – of pining it and holding it taut*" the experience will inevitably end.

If sociologically has something to offer to the discussion of these living things, it is not because the discipline has any particularly sophisticated traditions of experience.

However, what Sociology can offer, and what is vitally needed, is a sophisticated analysis of practices by which our magical relations are established and sustained. This gives lie to the rigid disciplinary distinctions that would insist the nature of the magical experience is the province of philosophers,. A philosophy of the magical experience can only be developed with and around a sociology of the magical experience. "A philosophy that does not include the possibility of soothsaying from coffee grounds and cannot explicate it cannot be a true philosophy," as Walter Benjamin famously formulated, and that explication comes only from a detailed analysis of the actual material and embodied practices that make up a magical experience in everyday life. The social world is enchanted, in that for the vast majority of its inhabitants things are alive They have the power to act upon us, as if they possessed transcendent powers, even if that action is temporary and fleeting. Identity is mediated and produced through interactions with things, relationships, names, and rituals that are magical in this sense. The identity that is produced through magical relationships in a commodified world may be ephemeral (never shallow) but this is because they serve us in an ephemeral world. The social sciences may have become disenchanted, but never the world, never in any true sense. If there was a fall from grace, it was Sociology that fell, fell into a predictable and low yield analysis of utility and instrumental function, failing to grasp that the most important aspects of social life, those that are most magical, involve the creation of a transcendent reality for which instrumental use is only the medium.

WOE TO THE INHABITERS OF THE EARTH!

Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me—Lamentations I:20

I hate my Thesis. I hate the topic, I hate
the execution, I hate the work I still
have left to do. I hate the program that wants
this Thesis complete. I hate each individual
teacher, as well as the whole damn group. I hate
the graduate students, infected by proximity
to Thesis. I hate the undergraduates
I shall have to teach—because they whine.
Where were they when *I* needed help, huh?
I hate the building where the soc. department
cowers. I hate the little strip of grass
in front of it, associated with
my Thesis. I hate the university,
for not doing something about all this.
I hate the Thesis office for ridding me
of all my cool fonts. I hate the city of Ames,
where all of this went down. I hate the state
of Iowa.. I hate the states united,
ibid. I hate the table on which the computer
stands, because that's where I hunched to write
the bloody Thesis, and don't even get me started
on the computer itself. I hate the books
and articles I had to read to write
the damn Thesis,—after all, they didn't
help enough. I might even come to hate
Dr Pepper, because while writing the Thesis
I drank a lot of it. I've now been up
for 24 hours, but if I want to sleep
I need to go to the library, 'cause it's too hot
in the apartment. The only thing going right
(but please don't hold your breath on this one lasting)
is that the Thesis director remains sanguine.
I finally gave Him the draft as well, and He saith,
"*Hey, what a great gift to receive in my box!*
I'll look forward to looking through it. Let's talk soon.
Seems to me that we should schedule a defense "

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper would not have been possible, or at least not as possible or as paper, without the aid and support of a whole host of friends, relations and teachers. Mom and John were a constant buoy against the harsh winds of discouragement and doubt, and served as long-range copy editors at a pinch. Sarah was always there, like a light in the darkness, keeping me going, motivating me, picking my face off the keyboard at night, and wiping the drool from my chin. My committee was a constant font of inspiration, and their influence rings through the whole work. Michael Bell, David Schweingruber, and Robert Hollinger, you guys were the greatest, the best committee I could have asked for. Although I cannot imagine an orthodox manner in which to reference their contribution, Sam and Elka have also made very real and tangible contributions to my understanding of the materiality of magic. I've had many teachers at Iowa State, and each has influenced me in their own special way. Through an amazingly consistent presentation of Sociology as a positivistic science in the classical tradition they focused me on my own unique brand of social thinking. Without this influence it never would have occurred to me that Satanism is really just like Sociology. I just love everybody.